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FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER 1995

'Wilful' Diana caught up in political row

Tory anger at plea for homeless

GLENDIA COOPER and PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES

The Princess of Wales was caught up in a political row yesterday after she appeared to support a strong attack on government policy on the homeless.

The Princess shared a platform with Jack Straw, the shadow Home Secretary, at a charity meeting during which she condemned the sight of young people who "resort to begging or worse, prostitution, to get money in order to eat". Mr Straw said youth homelessness was a "disgrace" which would be made worse by the Chancellor's cuts in benefit for young people.

Conservative MPs immediately condemned the Princess for breaching the tradition that members of the Royal Family do not get involved in politics. The speech was the Princess's second public engagement in the UK since her Panorama interview in which she said she wanted to become an "ambassador" for Britain, but the political future which broke yesterday will renew doubts about what public role - if any - she should have.

John Major was forced to defend government policy when asked about the comments in the Commons. The Prime Minister said: "We are fully committed to ensuring there is no necessity for some people to sleep rough and we very much hope that the culture that has grown up among some people of doing so is a culture that can change and be broken."

There had been a "remarkable reduction" in the numbers of people sleeping rough, Mr Major said, and plans to cut the numbers to zero continued.

Tory MPs were outspoken in

their condemnation of the Princess's remarks at the annual meeting of the homeless charity, Centrepoint, of which she is patron. John Marshall, MP for Hendon South, said: "I think it is quite wrong that a member of the royal family - however semi-detached - should appear to lend credence to the views of one political party or another."



Sir Patrick Cormack, MP for Staffordshire South, called the Princess a "headstrong and wilful young lady", criticising her for going on a platform "in a pre-election period, on a highly contentious subject, with a highly partisan politician". Sir Patrick said the Princess's action was "undemocratic and unconstitutional".

Some Tory backbenchers were furious that the Princess's remarks raised the implication that the Government had done nothing to tackle homelessness, whereas the policies were, they said, among the most effective in Europe.

In her comments the Princess revealed that she had visited volunteers and met homeless people

many times, most recently at a shelter in King's Cross in October. "Each time I visit I am appalled at the dangers young people face on the streets and how vulnerable they are to exploitation - 16 and 17-year-olds who resort to begging or worse, prostitution, to get money in order to eat," she said.

She described those she had met as "young people whose physical and mental health has been severely damaged by life on the streets. Young people who take drugs to provide some escape from the hardship they face... Young people who have been attacked and abused on the streets and face the indifferent stares of passers-by who have no idea how brave they are or how much they have suffered."

"It is truly tragic to see the total waste of so many young lives - of so much potential."

Centrepoint, which has 30 per cent more bedspaces in its shelters than last year, was doing vital work, the Princess said, but "each year is a struggle to make ends meet... when those needing help are becoming younger and more vulnerable."

Mr Straw told the conference: "Sleeping rough on the streets of Britain is no longer the appalling exception it ought to be. Homelessness is an affront to any society which claims to be civilised. Yet the situation of the young homeless seems set to worsen."

The Princess's "extremely powerful and moving" speech was welcomed by Chris Holmes, director of the housing charity Shelter.

"It matters because she said it extremely well and was drawing on her own experience of having seen the work of Centrepoint," he said.

Fertility breakthrough for cancer child



Happy and hopeful: Harriet Selka, despite having had both chemotherapy and radiotherapy, keeps laughing (above) while her mother, Elizabeth (below), believes her daughter may yet be able to have children of her own



GLENDIA COOPER

A three-year-old girl with cancer has made medical history by becoming the youngest patient to have part of her ovary frozen to enable her to have children in adulthood.

Surgeons at St James's Hospital, Leeds, have removed half of Harriet Selka's left ovary and stored it at -200C in liquid nitrogen so she will have a chance of having children later.

The cancer treatment that Harriet received - a combination of chemotherapy and radiotherapy - left her ovaries slightly damaged.

But doctors say the part of the ovaries that were removed in a 90-minute operation can be frozen for 20 years and may give her the chance to have children that she would otherwise have been denied.

Harriet is the youngest of several girl patients undergoing the pioneering research in Leeds and Manchester and the youngest ever to have part of her reproductive system frozen.

Grants of a quarter of a million pounds from the Leukemia Research Fund and the Kay Kendall Leukemia Fund to the research arm of the two Leeds hospitals' Assisted Conception Units have made the surgery possible.

Roger Gosden, Professor of Reproductive Biology at Leeds General Infirmary, who was in charge of Harriet's care, said: "Sometimes people say that reproductive technology is going too far and is on the edge of what is socially acceptable."

"I believe that what we're doing here will be socially acceptable to everyone because we're trying to restore the natural state."

Last night her mother, Elizabeth Selka, said: "Harriet is only one month into the treatment and it is too early to say whether it's going to be a success. But if you have children of your own, you want them to know the joys of having children themselves."

Harriet, of Thurstonland, near Huddersfield, West Yorks, who is suffering from Wilms' tumour, a type of kidney cancer, needs to undergo further surgery in the New Year.

Doctors now hope that the pioneering treatment used on Harriet could be used to help young boys who would be also rendered sterile by cancer treatment.

Probe into police intelligence unit

HEATHER MILLS

Home Affairs Correspondent

A top-level police inquiry has been launched into allegations of corruption involving the National Criminal Intelligence Service - Britain's fledgling FBI.

It is understood to focus on leaks of confidential information from the service to the criminal fraternity, including details of telephone taps and other material which it is suggested may have compromised investigations by both the NCIS and other police forces of the investigation is underlined by the fact that it is being headed by John Stevens, Northern Ireland's Chief Constable - the man who headed the multi-force inquiry into allegations of collusion between terrorist groups and members of the security forces in Northern Ireland.

The Chief Constable, together with an eight-strong team of detectives, has moved into the south-London-based headquarters of the service, which also houses the UK branch of Interpol, and which targets organised crime, big drug dealers and money launderers, as well as paedophiles and football hooligans.

Yesterday a spokesman for Northern Ireland police said: "It is not known how long the inquiry will take or where in the country the investigation might lead." An NCIS spokesman would only say that an inquiry into a "confidential matter" had been launched at the instigation of the service's Director General, Albert Pacey.

But the inquiry is a blow to NCIS, which is expected to lead the new national investigation force, including MI5, as it makes its controversial

TURN TO PAGE 2

Three men shot dead in gangland execution

WILL BENNETT

Three men found shot dead in a Range-Rover in a lonely Essex lane yesterday are believed to have been the victims of a gangland execution.

Detectives believe the victims were either abducted or lured to the lane in the village of Rettendon, near Chelmsford, where they were blasted in the head with a shotgun.

"They are known to us as criminals and certain lines of inquiry are taking place with that knowledge in mind," said Detective Superintendent Ivan Dibley, the officer heading the murder inquiry, last night.

Police will not release the names of the three men until they have been formally identified by relatives but they are aged between 20 and 40 and all

came from the south Essex area.

"They are people who I would put well above the bottom rung of the ladder in the criminal fraternity," Det Supt Dibley said.

The bodies were found in Workhouse Lane, on the outskirts of Rettendon, at 8am yesterday by Ken Jiggins and Peter Theobald, who were on their way to feed pheasants in nearby fields.

"Two were in the front of the metallic-blue Range-Rover, registration number F424 NPE, and the third man was in the back. The rear window had been smashed, apparently by a shot."

Mr Jiggins got out of the Land-Rover which Mr Theobald, 44, who farms the land, was driving and approached the Range-Rover. He

glanced inside, saw the men and not realising they were dead

tapped on the window. He said: "For all the world they looked as though they had fallen asleep in the car. I wasn't until I looked again that I realised they had been shot."

"I was shocked. It was not something I expected to find. The driver was lying with his head on one side and blood coming out of his nose."

The two men called the police who sealed off the murder site, which is 250 yards from the main A130 road from Chelmsford to Southend. The lane is well known to the local criminal fraternity and a hijacked cigarette lorry was taken there six years ago.

Yesterday afternoon the Range-Rover was lifted on to a police low-loader with the bodies still inside it, covered with

a tarpaulin, to be taken away for forensic analysis.

Det Supt Dibley said last night that he did not know whether the three men had been killed by a single gunman or whether several killers had been involved. "I believe that the killings took place at the scene," he continued. "There are no real signs in the vehicle of either a struggle or of an attempt by one or more persons to get out of the vehicle."

This tends to suggest that they were either surprised or that whoever did the crime was in the vehicle with them. They may have been forced to drive there at gunpoint."

He appealed for anyone who knew of the Range-Rover's movements between 6pm on Wednesday and 8am yesterday or who knew the owner to contact the police.

IN BRIEF

Major backs beef

John Major was forced to defend British beef in the Commons yesterday as calls grew for an independent inquiry into the risks posed to humans by mad cow disease. Page 6

Wife 'abused and refused'

The wife of the Tory MP David Ashby told a libel jury how he physically abused her, refused sex, and eventually confessed he was a homosexual. But Silvana Ashby added that she still loved her husband. Page 3

Animal magic nets £40m for pet shop boys

NIGEL COPE

Three men who make their living selling exotic pets including scorpions, tarantulas and chipmunks, were £40m richer yesterday when their company made a spectacular debut on the stock market.

Shares in Pet City, which runs 35 out-of-town pet superstores, soared during their first day's dealings, valuing the company at almost £90m. The flotation means an in-

stant bonanza for the founders who own almost half the company between them. Roger Pedder and Giles Clarke started the company in 1989 because they thought there was a gap in the market for the bulk buying of pet food and a fun, out-of-town, store. The shops sell pet food and pet accessories including doggy waistcoats and other fashion garments. Its "alternative" pets include snakes and iguanas, though its best seller is hamsters. A tarantula

starter kit, including spider, cage and heated pad to keep the arachnid warm in chilly winters, will set you back £32.99. A chipmunk starter kit is hit more pricey at £89.99.

However, the stores do not sell cats and dogs as the management feels it would be unfair to display them in a shop. Customers are directed to animal refuges and dogs homes instead.

The top management are not all pet mad. Richard North-

cott lives in a house full of dogs, cats and goldfish. He invested a £1m in the company in 1992. Three years later that stake is now worth around £15m.

Mr Clarke, who owns a similar amount of shares, likes pets but does not have any. "I live in rented accommodation and pets are not allowed," he said. He added that the three founders would not be selling any shares. "Obviously we're very pleased but we will not be selling any shares because we

want to develop the business." The company plans to expand rapidly and have 300 stores within eight years. It will open 17 stores next year boosted by the £20m of expansion capital it raised yesterday.



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news

Building recovery: Eddie George tells Treasury Committee that caution may benefit economy more in long-term

Bank ready to fight Clarke on rate cut



Eddie George: Not yet time for cut in interest rates

PAUL WALLACE and COLIN BROWN

Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, has hinted that he will oppose a cut in interest rates when he meets Kenneth Clarke next Wednesday.

Tory MPs anxiously hoping for a rate cut to fuel the "feel-good factor" after a lacklustre Budget were infuriated by his remarks.

The vice-chairman of the Conservative backbench finance committee of MPs, David Shaw, last night said his committee backed the Chancellor against Mr George's judg-

ment. "The officers of the finance committee are absolutely united in backing the Chancellor's stance on interest rates. All of us believe that by Easter there will be at least one or two small interest rate cuts of nine-quarter per cent each."

In evidence to the Treasury Select Committee, Mr George said the Bank was "very conscious of the idea that January is a key month for wage settlements". If the Ford pay offer of 9.5 per cent over two years were to become a benchmark for settlements, it would be "a very serious situation", and this would not become clear until well into January.

Another risk to the inflationary outlook could come from the renewed weakness of the pound, leading to a rise in import prices. Mr George reminded the committee that "the central bank's guess" of the Bank's inflation report in November was that inflation was still not on track to meet the Government's target of 2.5 per cent or less in two years' time.

Since that report, the pound has fallen by a further 2 per cent against a basket of currencies.

A further concern would be if the recent rapid growth in the amount of money in the economy were to persist. Mr George told the committee: "We will err

consistently on the side of not taking risks with inflation."

The chairman of the Conservative Party, Brian Mawhinney, gave the clearest hint after the Budget that interest rates would fall, to help fulfil the Government's hopes that the cautious Budget would pave the way for a general election victory.

Cuts in interest rates are vital to the overall strategy for reducing the cost of home loans, putting more money in people's pockets, boosting the housing market, and lifting Tory Party morale.

Senior Tory MPs said the economic fundamentals were sufficiently sound to justify an

interest rate cut as early as next Wednesday. But they believe the clash with Mr George is not sufficiently serious to force the Governor into resignation.

Eddie George conceded for the first time that if interest rates had been raised as he requested in May, the economy would have lost even more momentum this year.

He said Mr Clarke had been lucky to get away with his decision. "I think it turned out very fortunately for him." Referring to the subsequent rally in the value of the pound, he said: "We were bailed out of that frankly by a change of sentiment to the dollar."

Comment, page 25



Kenneth Clarke: Pressure from backbenchers

IN BRIEF

Howard set to deny Bridgewater appeal

The Home Secretary, Michael Howard, is "minded not" to refer the case of the "Bridgewater Four" back to Court of Appeal - but no final decision has been taken, the Home Office said last night.

In a statement, the Home Office said the convicted men's solicitors had been notified of Mr Howard's "provisional conclusions" not to refer and they now had an opportunity to respond.

Michael Hickey, 33, Vincent Hickey, 41, and James Robinson, 61, have protested their innocence since their convictions in 1979 for murdering newspaper delivery boy Carl Bridgewater. Carl, 13, was shot dead when he interrupted a burglary at a arm near Stourbridge, West Midlands, the previous year.

The confession of Patrick Molloy, who was convicted of manslaughter, was crucial to the case. Molloy died in 1981, claiming he had been forced into making the confession.

DPP conviction

Bernard Enerio, 17, was convicted of stabbing John Mills, 57, the husband of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Barbara Mills, in a mugging by a gang of six youths near Regent's Park, central London. Enerio, who admitted possessing the knife used in the attack in May, was found guilty of unlawful wounding and robbery. Sentence was adjourned. Mr Mills suffered a severed artery.

Flu cases rise

Flu and flu like illnesses rose to 178 cases per 100,000 of the population at the end of last week from 139/100,000 the week before, the Royal College of General Practitioners' flu monitoring bureau in Birmingham said. The threshold for an epidemic is 400/100,000.

Guppy freed

Darius Guppy, 29, was freed on conditional bail after being given leave to appeal against a jail term for refusing to pay compensation for the bogus gems robbery in New York that netted him £1.8m from Lloyd's insurers. Guppy, of Notting Hill, west London, has served five years for the false raid but was given three months to compensate insurers £227,000 or face a further three years jail.

'Ma Huggett' dies

Actress Kathleen Harrison, who played Ma Huggett opposite Jack Warner in the popular radio series *The Hugges*, died aged 103 at her London home. She was also well known for her role as a cookery charlady in the Sixties television series *Mrs Thursday*.

Dancer charged

A ballet dancer alleged to have punched a ballerina backstage has been charged with assault. A report on Robert Hampton, 32, principal dancer with the Scottish Ballet, has been sent to the procurator fiscal following a complaint from Catarina Lappin, 25, that she was assaulted in October during a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Edinburgh.

Lesson in success

Stratford School, in Newham, east London, scene of a bitter battle between its head teacher and governors three years ago, has been given a clean bill of health by inspectors. The opt-out school was found to be failing in 1994. Since then the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A-C grades at GCSE has risen from 4 to 28 per cent.

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New driving licence 'set to act as ID'

KATHERINE BUTLER
Brussels

Britain won the right yesterday to operate a new European credit card-style driving licence as a national identity card.

EU transport ministers endorsed the voluntary introduction of a uniform plastic licence for the 15-member states from July 1996. But Britain requested that the nationality of the bearer should be displayed on the front of the card alongside a photograph, and other data such as name, date of birth, and licence expiry date.

A number of other states voiced hostility to the British plan because of the implications for civil liberties, but agreed to a compromise which allows governments to include nationality or other "non-motoring" information - for example a national insurance number or the fact that the driver is an organ donor - on the back of the card.

They insisted, however, that the inclusion of nationality or other information should be conditional on the written consent of the licence holder.

Then European Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock, pre-empting charges that Brussels was imposing identity cards on Britain through the back door, issued a statement stressing that the primary function of the card is a driving licence.

British officials denied that yesterday's agreement brings closer the introduction of compulsory identity papers. It simply left open the possibility of operating a dual-function

licence/ID card which was one of six options outlined in a Home Office Green Paper last May.

Under existing European directives driving licences do not identify the holder's nationality, so a dual-function card would have been impossible without yesterday's compromise. "If we decide to pursue the introduction of identity cards in Britain, this is now one of the options open to us," a British official said.

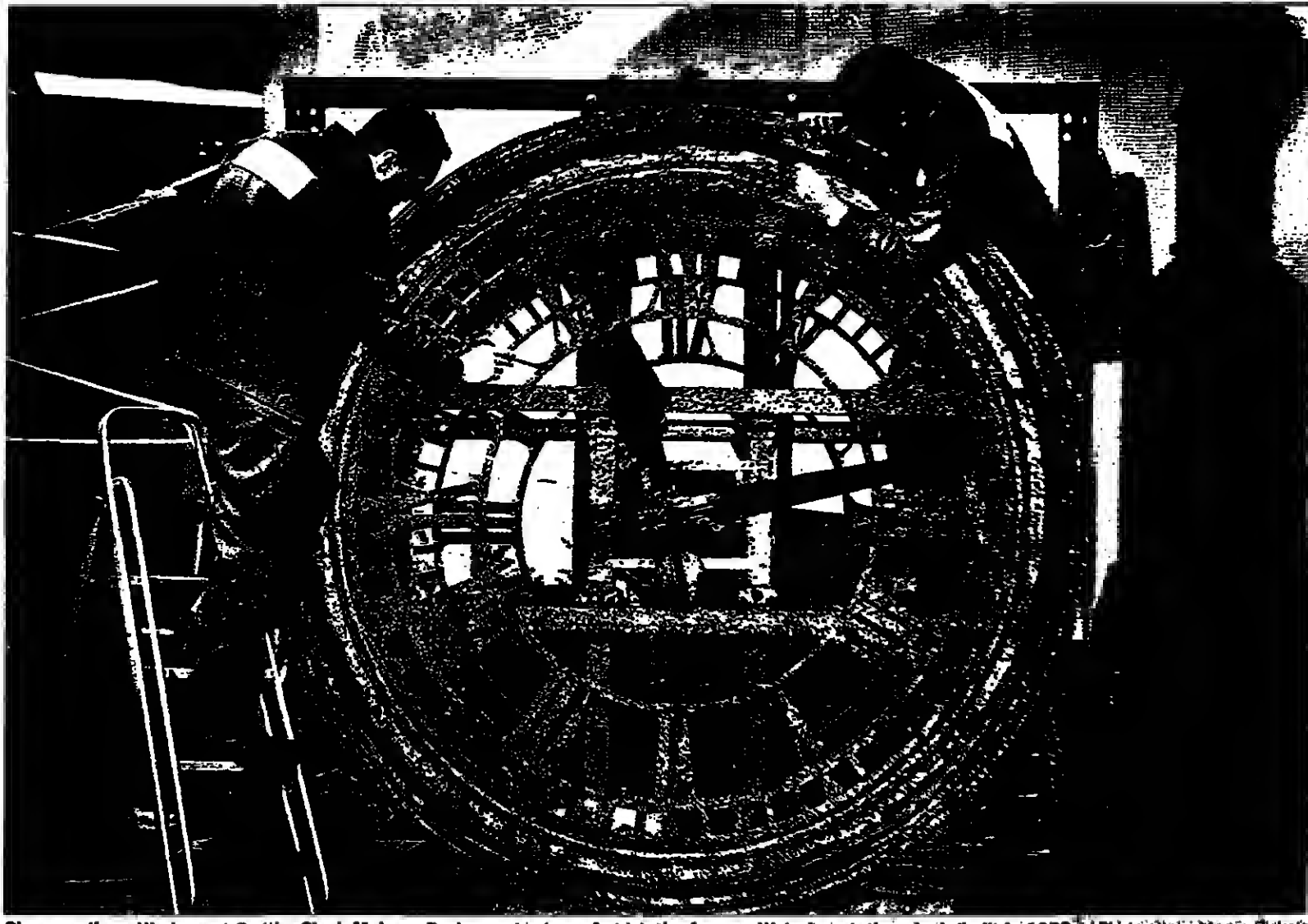
The new-style licence will be optional for member states but most, including Britain, are enthusiastic about switching from the existing pink paper version. The EU's 12 gold stars on a blue background will adorn the card, and the back will carry symbols of the various vehicle categories to allow instant recognition throughout the member states.

Earlier plans for the inclusion of a microchip carrying additional information which could be electronically read by police have been scrapped.

At Westminster, Graham Allen, Labour's transport spokesman, claimed the decision was a defeat for the Home Secretary Michael Howard, writes John Rentoul.

"This looks like sleight of hand - the Tories were trying to amend an EU proposal to create the basis for introducing a UK identity card by the back door," he said.

He added that the decision meant Mr Howard could not bring in the weakest of his plans for what would effectively be an ID card for Britain.



Clean up time: Workers at Smiths Clock Makers, Derby, yesterday refurbish the famous Waterford station clock, built in 1922. Photograph: Martin Ricketts

Police launch investigation into intelligence unit

FROM FRONT PAGE
Expansion into traditional police territory.

Established in April 1992 with a mission to spearhead the gathering of information about the activities of major criminals NCIS now has around 500 staff spread around the country and

a £25 million annual budget.

Its officers do not make arrests themselves, but gather, analyse and process intelligence into "packages" which they pass on to other forces which pursue the investigation. Under plans for a national police force, it will be given an operational wing

drawn from the country's existing six regional crime squads, which deal with serious offences. This will enable the force to target specific criminals, and make arrests.

The security services are expected to work alongside NCIS officers in carrying out surveillance and analysing data.

In the 1980s, Mr Stevens headed the multi-force inquiry into allegations of collusion between terrorist groups the security forces in Northern Ireland. The investigation concluded only recently and as a result of substantial changes were

made to army recruiting policy and the handling of security documents. Subsequently 46 people were convicted of offences ranging from conspiracy to murder to breaches of the Official Secrets Act, and sentenced to a total of more than 800 years in prison.

Dancer charged

A ballet dancer alleged to have punched a ballerina backstage has been charged with assault. A report on Robert Hampton, 32, principal dancer with the Scottish Ballet, has been sent to the procurator fiscal following a complaint from Catarina Lappin, 25, that she was assaulted in October during a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Edinburgh.

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Six horses killed by poison grass

JOHN MCKIE

Six horses - including one belonging to a former Olympic three-day eventer - have died in the past three weeks after eating a freak batch of thrashed rye grass, it was revealed yesterday.

The manufacturers of big bale process grass, Eurobale, yesterday admitted they were "mortified" at the deaths and last week spent "thousands of pounds" recalling a batch which they bought from an unnamed farmer in Skegness.

The batch is responsible for the fatal poisoning of the six horses, all of which suffered the symptoms of botulism. Botulism, a usually fatal cause of food poisoning, tends to kill only one horse a year on average in this country.

The first horse to die was at Mountfort University in Lincoln three weeks ago. More than a week later, Alfred, an experienced eventer, died in the Grantham yard of Tiny Clapham. Miss Clapham, a former Olympic rider, is trying to save two of her other horses

which have taken the bale by using an anti-serum available from Guy's Hospital.

Last Wednesday, the 18-year-old cob Blue, belonging to exhibitor Hazel Armstrong-Small, was put down at its home in Epping, Essex. Other horses in Lambourn and Kent have also died from the bales.

Nottingham-based bale manufacturers Eurobale, which has produced 11,218 tonnes of forage for race horses and riding stock since 1993, has not previously suffered any problems.

Richard Brooks, who runs the company with his father Geoff, said last night: "We were mortified to discover the deaths and would like to express deep concern for the owners. We always grow our own grass and we only bought from this farmer in July because it was a dry summer. We won't be buying from him again."

Eurobale have sent samples of the tainted grass to the Ministry of Agriculture's agricultural development and advisory service and are cooperating with a full inquiry.

Road chaos as cold sets in for weekend

The cold weather affecting Britain created more chaos on the country's roads and railways yesterday as weather forecasters predicted temperatures would drop further.

Although no new snowfalls are expected, weathermen warned freezing fog was likely to affect much of the country, making driving conditions treacherous.

A spokesman for the London Weather Centre warned of freezing temperatures as low as minus 5C (23F).

"We have had some snow showers in various parts of the country but it is coming to an end. By tomorrow no fresh snow is likely for a few days."

"The next problem will be freezing fog. There will be some tonight, in eastern and central England, and in Northern Ireland. It will be a real problem especially on Saturday when there will be areas of freezing fog and cold weather," he said.

The south of England took the brunt of the bad weather yesterday with parts of the



Winter coat: Weathermen predict temperatures of -5C

coastal region being turned into a "skating rink", according to the AA motoring organisation.

Driving conditions became appalling on several major roads in Kent, Hampshire and Sussex, with black ice and more heavy snow, it said.

Affected routes included the M20 and A21 in Kent, the M27 in Hampshire and the A259 in Hastings, East Sussex, where snow forced several motorists to abandon their vehicles.

By 4pm yesterday the AA said it had rescued 16,500 motorists, with flat batteries and frozen cooling systems mostly to blame.

The RAC said it had dealt with 14,000 emergency calls in a 12-hour period yesterday.

"Approximately a third of those were in London and the Home Counties, where we have been extremely busy," a spokesman said. Motorists were advised not to go out without a blanket and hot flask.

Judge to rule on railways' future

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR
Transport Correspondent

The future of rail privatisation will be decided in the High Court today when a judge rules on whether the Government was wrong to allow potential cuts in services.

Yesterday, in a legal challenge to privatisation, Nigel Fleming QC, for the anti-privatisation group Save our Railways, said that the franchising director, Roger Salmon, should not have set minimum service levels for new operators which were well below the present timetable.

Mr Fleming said that the then Secretary of State, John MacGregor, had issued clear instructions in March 1994 that the service levels should be broadly the same before and after franchising.

However, when Mr Salmon, who acts under the direction of the Secretary of State for Transport, had drawn up "Passenger Service Requirements" (PSRs) for the first lines to be franchised, they required operators only to run a percentage of ex-

isting trains. Mr Fleming read out a number of letters from rail passengers and campaigners who had analysed the new PSRs and in many cases the proposed services were well below those currently run by British Rail.

Mr Fleming said that when the Railways Bill was being debated in Parliament in 1993 the message from the Government was: "Don't worry about existing levels of services. When we franchise, the existing level at that time will be the level that is franchised. Trust us on this."

The emphasis of guidelines and instructions given to Mr Salmon was on getting value for money and on flexibility.

Mr Justice Macpherson will give his judgment this afternoon and has said it will apply to all seven of the first franchises.

If Save our Railways is successful, Mr Salmon will have to postpone his announcement of the successful bidders, which is scheduled for next Tuesday, and the Government may be forced to start the whole franchising process from scratch, causing months of delays.

MP's label case
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صكتا من الامل

MP's libel case: Tory 'confessed he was homosexual' as his 29-year marriage fell apart, court is told

Ashby's wife tells of 'abuse and rejection'

REBECCA FOWLER

As a public airing of the private nightmare of a marriage, it had the lot. The wife of Tory MP David Ashby told a libel jury how he physically abused her, refused sex, and eventually confessed he was a homosexual.

Silvana Ashby, 53, who spoke in a hoarse Italian accent, told the jury yesterday that she felt constantly rejected by her husband. On one occasion, she said, he held a pillow over her face after an argument, and he said she should book appointments if she wished to talk to him.

Mrs Ashby was giving evidence against her husband in his libel case against the *Sunday Times* and Andrew Neil, its former editor. Mr Ashby denies he is a homosexual.

When the couple agreed to separate in October 1993, Mrs Ashby tearfully told the court, her husband said he had had a brief encounter with a man some years ago on a holiday in the Seychelles, and confessed he was gay. "I used to say to him 'you're different, I don't understand you any more. You've changed, that you like the company of men more than women,'" Mrs Ashby said.

"He came into the kitchen and said 'I've got to tell you something, I have changed', and he started to cry... I said to him 'if you change once, can't you change again?' He said 'it's not as easy as that.' When she asked what he meant, he said: 'I had an encounter many years ago. Then I put it out of my mind and now I can't.'"

Fighting back tears, Mrs Ashby told the court: "I was in no doubt that he was telling me he was homosexual." She denied she had used words like "poof" or "poofier" to her husband.

Asked about her reaction to what her husband had told her, she said: "In a way I was pleased, because I knew there was nothing wrong with me. I had thought for years that I was a terrible person and that that was why he didn't like me."

As Mr Ashby sat on the other side of the courtroom, often resting his head in his hands, Mrs Ashby, dressed in a pale blue jumper and pearls, clutched a handkerchief and told the jury how her marriage fell apart.

The couple met on a skiing holiday in 1964, and both described it as 'love at first sight'. They spoke in French because neither understood the other's native tongue.

They married in a Roman Catholic church the following year and Mrs Ashby moved from Italy to Chelsea.

But Mrs Ashby said she was isolated by her husband, a barrister, from the start of their marriage. "He was always at work, and at weekends he was out playing rugby."

"I couldn't speak the language, I had no friends, no relatives here. I said to my husband 'can you be at home more?' he said 'I'll buy you a dog instead'."

When Mr Ashby became MP for Leicestershire North-West in 1983, Mrs Ashby said he told her she was now irrelevant to him. "He said 'remember for you I am dead, I don't exist for you any more. I will dedicate myself to my work.'"

Mrs Ashby also described her sex life as "not very satisfactory" to Richard Hartley QC for the *Sunday Times*. At first she said she took Mr Ashby's indifference to her affections as typical English coldness, but she felt increasingly rejected.

After Mr Ashby returned from a visit to his brother, Brian, who was openly homosexual, in the US, Mrs Ashby said her husband flinched when she put her arm around him. "He pushed me aside and said 'don't touch me, don't touch me, never touch me again.'"



Alleged relationship: David Ashby (left) and Dr Claran Kilduff

Mrs Ashby continued: "He was always very cross, very angry. I'd say 'please talk to me', he'd say 'I have no time' and leave the house slamming the door. On occasions he'd say 'make an appointment if you want to talk to me, come and see me in my office.'"

Although Mrs Ashby said she had been suspicious of her husband's relations with men, including Tim, a young parliamentary researcher, she said she did not become aware he was homosexual until later.

When Mr Ashby left her in 1993, after 28 years of marriage, to live in a flat in Putney, Mrs Ashby believed he was having an affair with his neighbour, Dr Claran Kilduff, 32. Both men deny physical intimacy.

But Mrs Ashby said she still loved her husband. "If you love someone you trust them fully, and I loved David more than my life," she said. "I still do."

The case continues.



Silvana Ashby: 'He'd say make an appointment if you want to talk to me'

Mental patients to be treated with art

DECCA AITKENHEAD

Patients with mental health problems are to be prescribed painting, sculpting and creative writing on the NHS, instead of drugs. "Arts On Prescription", a radical new scheme launched this week, will enable doctors to treat depression and anxiety by sending chronic sufferers to art classes.

A pilot scheme is to begin in various economically deprived areas of Manchester. Participating GPs, consultants, community psychiatric nurses and social workers will refer patients who suffer from mental health complaints like panic attacks to an Arts and Mental Health Nurse. The patients will then be offered a range of art classes, from drama and dance to ceramics and photography, and, after consultation, be prescribed a 10-week course.

Like any other NHS medical treatment, the art classes will be free. Annual costs of £10,000 will be met jointly by Stockport Health Authority and the local council.

"People find these sorts of expressive activities, done in a group, give them a chance to develop their confidence and self-esteem, and give them a social contact at a level they are comfortable," a community mental health team spokeswoman said.

"Mental ill-health is a huge burden on the NHS, and shows itself through many physical and mental problems. This treatment gets us out of looking at everything from a problem-based viewpoint."

A typical patient, she said, would be a woman with a family and little time to herself, struggling with relationship difficulties and suffering from low self-esteem, insomnia and lack of motivation. "You can give her a dose of Prozac and hope she'll get better, but you are never going to solve the problem unless you tackle how she deals with her life."

The severely disturbed and suicidal will not be eligible for the classes, to be taught by artists with no medical training in local church halls and social clubs. Schizophrenics and manic depressives in a stable condition may take part, though.

Arts On Prescription was inspired by an earlier Manchester project, Exercise On Prescription, where GPs prescribed free sessions in the gym or the swimming pool to patients with coronary problems. Participants reported that the greatest improvements had been to mental rather than physical well-being, and demand grew for arts-based activities.

New wheelie-bins give pensioners a clean break

CLEANING THE BIN

Try putting newspaper in the bottom of the bin to absorb any moisture.

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A detail from Wakefield council's leaflet on wheelie-bins

GLENDIA COOPER

A growing number of elderly people in West Yorkshire are in hospital with broken limbs after falling into new council wheelie-bins.

In Pontefract, where the large grey bins replaced conventional dustbins several months ago, there has been a "significant" rise in wheelie-bin related incidents. In attempts to clean the bins, pensioners have fallen across or into the bins or been knocked over by them.

Staff at the fracture clinic of Pontefract General Infirmary noticed a larger number of old people coming in with fractures to arms and legs and discovered that the injuries were linked by close encounters with the bins, which have two and a half times the capacity of their old ones.

Bridget Gill, marketing manager of the infirmary, said that there were three ways in which old people were injuring themselves. "Many people fractured their wrists by standing on something and then leaning

into the bin and toppling over on to it," she said.

"There was one chap who clambered into a bin to stamp down the rubbish and fractured his ankle in the process. And people trying to move the bins in a strong wind get knocked over. There's a wide variety of injuries."

Wakefield council introduced the wheelie-bins in June and sent round a leaflet explaining its advantages and advice on cleaning it. "Try putting newspaper in the bottom to absorb

any moisture. The smooth plastic sides are easy to wash and putting the bin on its side will help tackle the job," it read.

Ms Gill said that elderly people had been disregarding the guidance: "They were told not to put themselves in a position of danger. They were simply not following instructions."

She did not know why Pontefract had become a hot spot for wheelie-bin victims: "It may well be prevalent in other places but maybe they don't talk about it so much," she suggested.

John Skidmore, Wakefield's cleansing services manager, said he was "not aware of any particular problems regarding injuries to members of the public as a result of the wheeled-bin system of refuse collection".

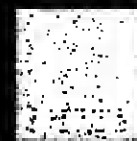
He stressed that the public must follow instructions given to clean their bins safely, but said that anyone with a particular problem should contact their wheeled-bin helpline.

Whether that is before or after they end up in the bin, he did not specify.

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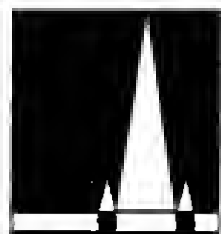
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Health trends: Medical advances are increasing life expectancy without reducing the risk of illness or disability in old age

A longer life in sickness not in health

LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

British men and women are living longer but their extra years of life may be far from productive, marred by poor health and disability, according to new research.

In contrast to steady increases in life expectancy over the past 20 years, healthy life expectancy – the number of years people can expect to enjoy good health – has stayed the same or risen only slightly.

A report from the Office of Population Censuses & Surveys (OPCS) says that for men aged 65, healthy expectancy remained almost constant between 1976 and 1992 at about seven years. For women aged 65, there was an increase of just one year between 1988 and 1992 from 9 to 10 years.

Karen Dunnell, an OPCS health statistician, said that although men reaching pensionable age can now expect to live until 79 and women to 83, the findings had serious implications for the planning of health and social care. The "extra years of life gained by the elderly are extra years with a disability, not extra years of healthy life", she says.

Overall, the report, "Are we healthier?" in the winter issue of *Population Trends*, produces conflicting data on changes in the general health of the population over a 20-year period.

There are indications of a decline in mortality from all causes for those aged under 20 and 45 and over. But this is countered by little improvement in mortality from all causes for those aged 20-44.

Deaths from heart disease

are falling, while deaths from stroke have declined dramatically. However, there is little change in cancer fatalities overall, despite improvements in deaths from stomach, bladder, pancreatic and rectal cancers in men, and cervical and bowel cancers in women.

Lung cancer deaths in men – which account for a third of all male cancer deaths – have fallen. In women, deaths from the disease appear to be levelling off after increases in recent years related to the fact women took up smoking after men.

Bowel, prostate, and oesophageal cancer deaths in men, and bladder cancer deaths in women, have increased. Breast cancer deaths, after climbing slowly, are declining. This may be because of the increasing use of the drug tamoxifen and possibly because of the wider availability of breast screening.

Widespread improvements in dental health are reported; the number of children with decayed teeth at all ages fell from almost 60 per cent in 1973 to less than 30 per cent in 1993.

The report confirms the growing number of obese people despite health education efforts to change eating habits. In 1980, 6 per cent of men aged 16 to 64 were obese; by 1993, the figure had risen to 13 per cent.

In women, obesity doubled from 8 per cent in 1980 to 16 per cent by 1993. The number of men who are overweight has risen from 33 per cent in 1980 to 43 per cent in 1993. For women, there has been an increase from 24 per cent to 30 per cent.

Other behaviours related to poor health, including smoking

and alcohol consumption, also appear resistant to health advice. Among 16- to 19-year-olds whose parents are semi- or unskilled workers, almost 50 per cent of girls and 33 per cent of boys smoke.

In families from skilled backgrounds, 29 per cent of girls smoke and 28 per cent of boys. Where the parents are professional, 21 per cent of boys smoke and 22 per cent of girls are smokers.

Alcohol consumption stabilised in men with the number drinking above the weekly recommended limit of 21 units set at around 27 per cent (1992). But in women, the proportion drinking 14 units rose 2 or 3 per cent between 1984 and 1992 and now stands at 11 per cent.

Ms Dunnell concluded that at a simple level it appears people are healthier because of improving mortality rates and greater life expectancy. "However, surveys of reported and measured health status suggest there is no comparable, general improvement in health."



Fit for life: Exercise may help pensioners such as Stanley Meeks (above), 69, avoid disability in later years

Photograph: Dillon Bryden

'I hate feeling unable to fend for myself'

CLARE GARNER

CASE STUDY

Stanley Meeks, 69, from Plumstead, south-east London, has a clean bill of health and he works out twice a week at the Waterfront Leisure Centre, in Greenwich, to keep it that way. "I've always been interested in keeping fit and I thought as I get older it might be an idea to stay out of the local hospital."

I hate the feeling of being alone and decrepit and unable to fend for myself," said the retired tourist officer after a cardiovascular session yesterday.

"Some of the load-bearing exercises like the weights help a lot. So many of my friends go down with knee and hip problems." Not one of them goes to

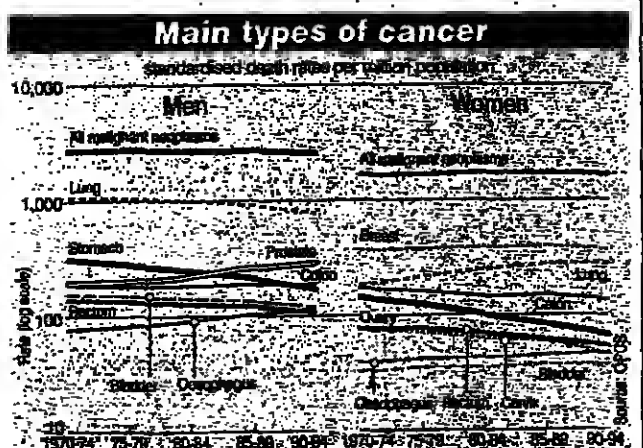
the gym. "I suppose a heart attack of some kind is the biggest worry. Every now and again I try and persuade my doctor to take my blood pressure but he doesn't seem to be keen. He's probably worried about what he would find."

"I have the occasional pint of beer, glass of wine, and gin and tonic – but I try not to mix them together. I am what you would

call a very moderate drinker and I don't smoke. Since retirement I've done all the normal things like cut down to semi-skimmed milk."

Mohamed Hussein, 50, also from Plumstead, yesterday made his debut in the keep fit world. A television programme on heart disease prompted him to sign up for an induction session at the Waterfront centre.

"The main reason I am here is to get rid of all the unnecessary fat. The media has shown the sorts of problems you face in the future if you don't exercise. As a play leader in a council-run leisure centre, Mr Hussein wants to set a good example. "It's better for me to be fit so at least I can tell the children I work with that they should be fit."



Breast cancer study shows link to stress

NICHOLAS TIMMINS

The most clear-cut evidence yet that stress can cause cancer has come from a study of more than 100 women from the breast cancer clinic and screening unit at King's College Hospital, London.

When the women were questioned about their past life before the diagnosis was made, it was found that almost half of those who proved to have the disease had undergone one or more "adverse life events" in the previous five years.

Among those who proved disease-free, however, less than one-fifth had suffered similarly. Severe events, among other things, were defined as including bereavement, being made redundant or bankrupt, becoming homeless, being mugged or having a son or daughter arrested.

The findings suggest that a link between life stress and cancer may indeed exist, the team from the Institute of Psychiatry and King's College Hospital conclude in this week's *British Medical Journal*.

Hormonal responses to stress may affect the body's immune system, the study team specu-

lates, and this increases the chances of cancer developing. It appears, however, not only that there is little that individuals can do about it, but also that those who cope aggressively with such events, rather than giving in to them or simply moving on to the next thing in life, may actually be at higher risk of the disease.

"The downbeat message is that many of these events are not really happenings that you have any control over," Dr Tony David, a reader in psychological medicine at the Institute of Psychiatry, said yesterday. "They just happen to you, and you just have to hope that they don't."

But there was also an irony in the finding that those who confronted their stress might actually be at higher risk of disease.

"There may be a trade-off here between psychological and physical health," Dr David said. "Coping positively with these things is good for your psychological health – you wouldn't want to advise people not to do so because they would become depressed. But there may be a physical risk in confronting them aggressively."

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news

Calls grow for 'mad cow' inquiry



To beef or not to beef: Shoppers outside a butcher's in the Victoria Centre, Southend

Photograph: Nick Turpin

Beef scare: Major rejects human link as consumer groups press for action

CHARLES ARTHUR, LOUISE JURY and CATHY NEWMAN

The Prime Minister was forced yesterday to defend British beef in the Commons yesterday as calls grew for an independent inquiry into the risks posed to humans by mad cow disease.

As Labour MPs and consumer watchdogs called for a separate inquiry to investigate whether mad cow disease could cause its human equivalent, John Major told MPs: "There is currently no scientific evidence that BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy] can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD [Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease] in humans. That issue is not in question."

Yet government reassurances appeared to be failing, as more than 1,150 schools announced they have cut beef from lunch menus or are offering alternatives. And leading scientists raised fears that industrial techniques used in abattoirs could still be spreading the infection into meat. The National Consumer Council urged tighter regulations for slaughterhouses to ensure that potentially dangerous offal did not slip into food.

Nigel Griffiths, Labour consumer affairs spokesman, said: "People are confused and they want to know whether or not they should be eating beef."

Sue Dibb, co-director of the independent watchdog, the Food Commission, said: "I think nobody is trusting what is coming out of government any more. The Government seems to be more interested in propelling up the beef industry than admitting that there may be a risk, however small it may be."

She said she was not satisfied by the position of the Spon-

form Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), composed of eight independent scientists who advise the Government on BSE. "Being advisers means that the minister doesn't have to act on or publish their advice," Ms Dibb said.

The Consumers' Association said a public inquiry could help give people the information they needed.

BSE was first identified in 1986, but the controversy over the risk to public health took on renewed life last week when Sir Bernard Tomlinson, a former government medical adviser, said he had stopped eating anything containing beef offal.

Scientists' present fears about the risk posed by eating beef have begun to focus on procedures used in slaughterhouses to remove the brains and spinal cords from carcasses.

The brain and spine are known to be the most infectious parts of the animal, and since 1989 regulations have said that they should not be consumed.

In many cases abattoir workers remove the spinal cord by cutting into the spine with a water-cooled circular saw, and scientists fear this could spread infective spinal material on to meat.

The Ministry of Agriculture admitted last night that its 780 inspectors, who check meat before it leaves British slaughterhouses, would probably not witness the method used to remove the spine.

Schools in Avon, Cleveland, Essex, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Surrey, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Wiltshire and West Glamorgan have taken beef off menus. At least 11 other areas have banned products containing beef offal, such as liver.

Degrees 'need a benchmark'

WENDY BERLINER

Education Correspondent

Minimum standards for what constitutes a university degree or a graduate in the highly expanded modern university system were called for yesterday by the Government's adviser on higher education.

Degree courses which did not reach these minimum standards would, by implication, lose their funding and students who do not possess graduate attributes would not get a degree.

In a far-reaching report on graduate standards published yesterday, the Higher Education Quality Council says it is now impossible to know whether degrees in the same subject at different universities are comparable.

The HEQC report is the first attempt to promote nationally accepted threshold standards in the university system. It follows the enormous expansion of the university sector when the polytechnics became universities in 1992. There are now 104 universities, four times the number there were in the early 1960s, and 1.5 million students, six times the number 30 years ago.

On top of this there has

been a proliferation of new subjects taught at university and a huge change in the entrance tickets held by students. The typical student of the early 1960s was middle to upper class, from a public school or grammar school, and had two A levels. Now a much wider band of social background and ability go to university.

The lecturers, too, are less homogeneous. Put together, it means the old system of comparing standards, in which lecturers from one institution act as external examiners at another, is no longer effective.

Dr Peter Wright, assistant director of the HEQC, said yesterday: "Standards may be rising, they may be falling. One cannot tell. The outcomes of higher education must be made much more explicit. We are not saying they must all be the same, but we do need to know what is genuine diversity and what is an inappropriate variation in standards."

□ Graduate Standards Programme. Interim Report. Higher Education Quality Council. £10. Available from the Support Section, UCAS, Fulton House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3SH.

Girls face school ban over rugby coaching

STEVE BOGGAN

Two girls may be banned from a school for refusing to take part in rugby coaching.

Lucy Gregory, 13, and her sister, Katie, 11, have been caught up in a row between their parents, who believe the sport is aggressive and dangerous, and the school's board of governors, who argue that the version of rugby on the curriculum is harmless.

Both sides in the argument at Purbrook Park School, near Havant, Hampshire, have taken legal advice that could lead to the girls being excluded in the new year.

The row erupted last month when Lucy told her parents, Caroline, 40, and Peter, 41, that she had been instructed to buy a rugby jersey and a gumshield in order to play the game. Mrs Gregory made inquiries and was told that the school's PE curriculum demanded that all 760 boys and girls had to take part in nine hours a year of tag rugby, which involves passing and scoring tries without physical contact. Pupils wear ribbons that must be pulled to represent a tackle.

"I have no problem with tag rugby because that isn't violent, but I was told that the girls must also take part in lessons to teach them how to tackle prop-



No choice: Lucy (left) and Katie Gregory, whose parents insist they must be allowed to opt out of playing rugby

erty," Mrs Gregory said. "Now that involves serious physical contact and neither of my daughters wanted to do it. The school said the lessons would be supervised but they still involve the risk of injury, otherwise why would a gumshield be necessary?"

The matter came to a head on 22 November when, during a meeting with the school's curriculum committee, the Gregorys said they had been advised that to force the girls into physical contact would represent "trespass on the person by design". The governors adjourned the meeting and took

legal advice. On 24 November, Elizabeth Tullett, the chairwoman, wrote to say the girls had to play rugby and added: "This involves tackling and we are not prepared to change this." She said the Gregorys had to agree to the girls playing rugby or remove them from the school.

"It is diabolical that someone can force children to play rugby against their will," Mr Gregory said. "I played the game for four years and lost four teeth, had my ear half-ripped off and damaged my knee—but that was my choice. These people aren't giving my daughters a choice."

Mrs Gregory said she would not remove the girls from the school, but neither would she agree to their taking part in tackling lessons.

Both girls have continued to attend the grant-maintained school but neither is playing rugby. Lucy has been excused because she has water on the knee and Katie becomes eligible only after Christmas. That is when the matter is likely to come to a head.

Michael Dopson, the headmaster, said he was resigned to the school's emerging as the villain of the piece, but higher principles were at stake.

"If we allow one pupil to choose what they will and will not do, we will have to allow all the others as well," he said. "Then it could spill over into lessons. What would I say when a parent said: 'Excuse me, but I don't want my child taught about the Holocaust'?"

"The Rugby Football Union has confirmed that our rugby lessons are safe, and schools inspectors actually praised our curriculum in the summer. During the whole term, real tackling amounts to just 20 minutes."

Lucy Gregory said: "I like the school and I don't want to leave it. But rugby is an aggressive sport. I wouldn't like to be hurt, but I would feel even worse if I hurt a friend."

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Viewers uneasy at broadcasters' sex guidelines

MARIANNE MACDONALD
Media Correspondent

Viewers are still heavily dependent on the timing of a television programme to decide whether it is likely to have sex, violence or swearing in it.

According to research by the Broadcasting Standards Council, most still rely on the 9pm watershed to decide whether programmes will be suitable for children or not, and nearly all want more information about programme content.

The BSC survey of 1,000 men and women, published yesterday, found that 86 per cent of people were in favour of the 9pm watershed, but 41 per cent wanted it to be later at the weekend.

Respondents were divided over whether the 9pm crossover point should apply to news, with 40 per cent saying it should and 52 per cent saying it should not. Only 9 per cent did not want a watershed on satellite or cable television.

Most viewers did not want all broadcasting to be suitable for children, but felt strongly that schedulers should put programmes out at an appropriate time. There was still marked unease about sex and violence,

with viewers expressing concern about a lesbian kiss shown in *EastEnders*. Broadcast warnings of adult material – which could take the form of symbols in listings pages – were backed by 94 per cent of respondents. Of those, 77 per cent thought rape scenes and “distressing scenes about children” might require a warning. Violence was cited by 74 per cent, “extreme sex” by 71 per cent and bad language by 65 per cent.

The researchers also asked men and women to recreate their personal television schedule from memory, naming the transmission days and times of programmes.

The differences between the male and female schedules reveals the macho factor of programmes such as *Panorama* and *Newsnight* and the F-factor of shows such as *2point4children* and *Bramwell*.

The embarrassingly blank spaces also reveal the long-running shows which have failed to find a place in the nation's psyche, such as *Wish You Were Here*, *Dispatches* and *Horizon*.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the men's mental list showed knowledge of the day and time of a number of daytime pro-

grammes, including *Home & Away*, *Neighbours* and *Star Trek*.

Although very similar, the women's daytime list also included programmes squarely aimed at a female audience such as *This Morning* and *Oprah*. They also listed *Grandstand*, but unlike the men, were aware of the Saturday omnibus edition of *Brookside*.

It will be a relief to many to learn that the BBC's *Nine O'Clock News* and ITN's *News at Ten* were listed by both men and women. But Channel 4's 7pm bulletin – which attracts an older audience – did not get a mention.

Audience reactions to particular scenes in programmes were also examined. A quarter of respondents said of a lesbian kiss in *EastEnders* that such material should not be in a soap opera at all, while 29 per cent felt it should not have been shown at the time scheduled.

In contrast, viewers did not react badly to a scene in *Emmerdale* that showed a violent raid on a post office and the taking of a hostage.

Ninety-four per cent said guidance on the content of programmes should be available on listings pages.



Light relief: Children from London schools taking part in a candle-lit service at Westminster Abbey yesterday. Organised by the Children's Society, the event was designed to encourage the pupils to think of those less fortunate during the Christmas period. Photograph: Geraint Lewis

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Flexibility at work costs staff dear

BARRIE CLEMENT
Labour Editor

Britain's increasingly flexible working methods provide employers with considerable advantages but yield few benefits for their employees, according to research published today by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Part-time and temporary working offers organisations a means of cutting labour costs, responding to business fluctuations and extending operating hours, but the predominantly female staff are low paid and have few chances of promotion.

The study, conducted by Industrial Relations Services among 30 companies in retail and finance, also found that such workers were offered little training and were vulnerable to employers' demands to change working hours which could come into conflict with childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

It was found that while many female part-timers valued their working arrangements because it fitted commitments at home, employers introduced flexibility for commercial rather than equal opportunities reasons.

Summarising the findings of three reports, the commission conceded that equal opportunities policies were useful, but had yielded a limited impact. The problem was that pay and conditions were outside the scope of such policies.

Kamlesh Bahl, the commission chairwoman, said flexible working ought to be good news for women trying to combine

work and family duties, but she recognised it also had its downside. She said the commission was talking to employers and unions to seek out examples of good practice.

Ms Bahl fought shy of calling for fresh legislation to protect part-timers, arguing that the commission was still investigating the issue.

The commission had a reputation for challenging existing laws, but it was also important to promote the practices of good employers wherever they were found. Evidence showed that employers did not save money by paying low wages and suffering a high labour turnover as a consequence.

She warned that full-time permanent employment was disappearing. "Flexibility is here to stay." Research sponsored by the commission confirmed that the bulk of employees under taking "flexible" jobs were women. Two out of five women of working age were in part-time jobs, compared with less than one in 10 men.

While flexible working had improved the opportunities for women to work, the recent restructuring of organisations by "downsizing" or by "delayering" had meant that more work was being done by fewer staff.

It had been found that although the number of women in new management jobs had increased, the status of the posts had not been as high as those held previously by men.

The studies found that black women were "invisible", especially in supervisory and management jobs.

DAILY POEM

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Epistle to Mr Pope

By Michael Glover

You ask me, Mr Pope,
What it is exactly that I feel now, being dead,
And lodged here in these Elysian Fields.
With the Black Sea beneath me,
And the fountains playing about my heels,
I feel serene, soft and beyond the call
Of the world's manifold impertinences – yes, that above all –
No longer wishing to arbitrate
Between the red shift and the gold,
Or become impassioned over
Those interminable games of piquet of old.
I wish you well with your labours
Down there in those filthy London streets.
And, did I not feel its opposite,
I might even say to you: let us meet...

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, daughter of the Duke of Kingston, was one of the cleverest women of the 18th century. Letter-writer extraordinaire (her Turkish Letters, written while her husband was ambassador to Constantinople, were admired throughout Europe), a romantic who eloped with her first husband and took young lovers into old age, and one of the first Englishwomen to make an art-form of living abroad, she lived with individuality and passion throughout her life. The passion included a long friendship with the poet and satirist Alexander Pope which ruptured violently and publicly when they were in middle-age. Mutual mud-slinging continued to the grave.

This poem appears in Michael Glover's second collection *Impossible Horizons*, published by Sinclair-Stevenson at £7.99.

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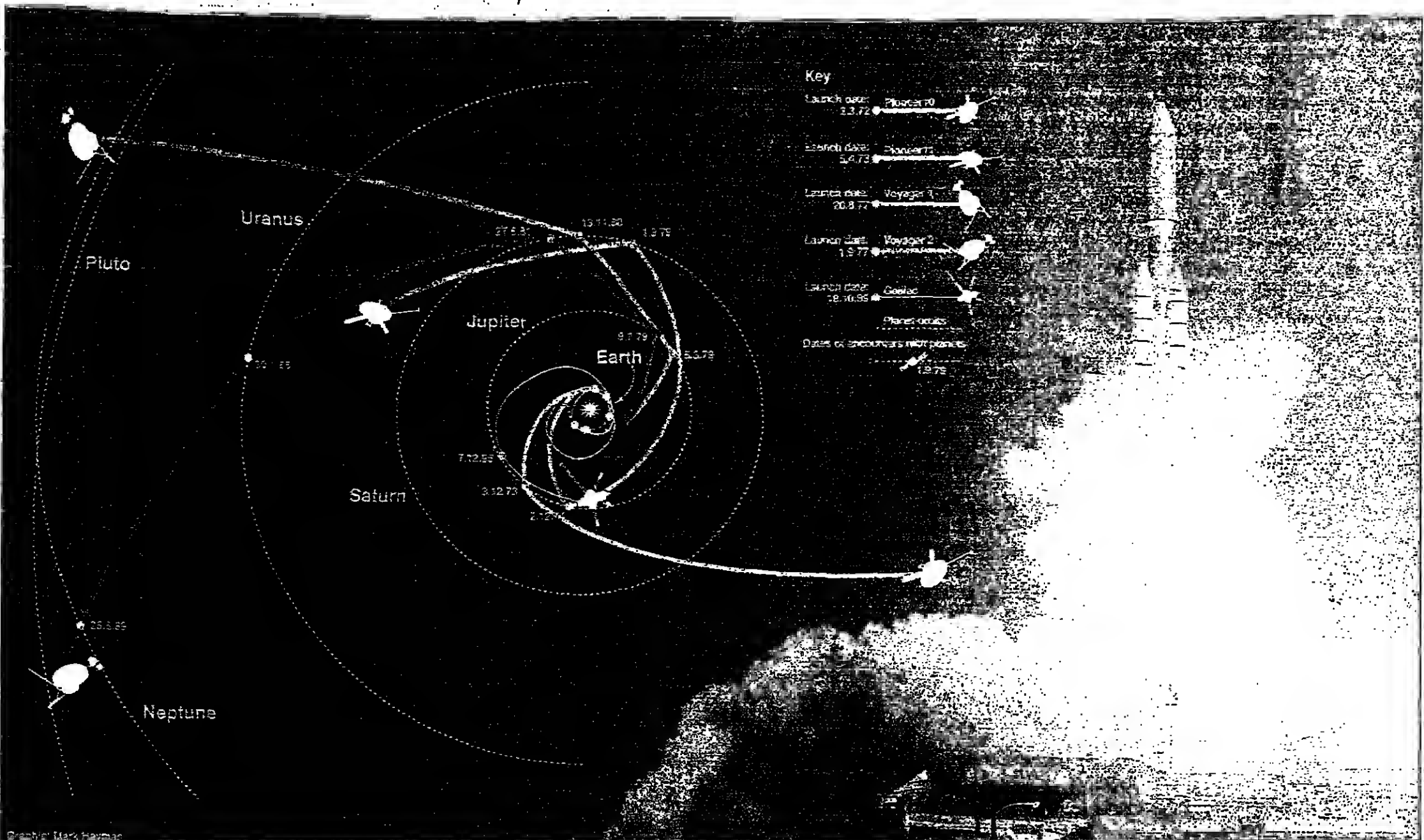
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Galileo boldly goes to the limit of science



The final frontier: Nasa's latest space probe is leading the way to a new understanding of our Solar System

TOM WILKIE
Science Editor

For six years, the Galileo space mission to Jupiter has been toiling alone in the void of space. Now, at the end of its 2.3-billion-mile odyssey, it has company – in the form of the solar system's largest planet, its faint rings, and its 16 known moons.

The space probe's extraordinary travels involved interplanetary snooker, with Galileo looping round Venus once, then heading back to Earth twice to gain enough gravitational en-

ergy to carry it across the 360 million miles between the earth's orbit and that of Jupiter. It has twice come close to asteroids, the tiny planetoids which tend to lie between the orbit of Mars and Jupiter. But although it is the first man-made probe to examine Jupiter in detail, Galileo is not the first to fly past the planet. The Voyager and Pioneer missions have been to the outer planets before. And, bizarrely, a mission to explore the Sun included a detour to Jupiter.

While scientists await the

data from Galileo's six-year-long wanderings – much of it concerned with the Jovian "weather" – attention has switched, within the past month, from the largest planet to the weather on the largest object in the entire solar system, the Sun itself. The craft sent to probe the Sun have had, like Galileo, to travel bizarre and wonderful paths to reach their destinations.

On 2 December, the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (Soho) took off aboard an Atlas rocket from the Kennedy Space Centre. After a four-

month journey covering 1.5 million kilometres, this European Space Agency satellite will take up a unique orbit – not around a planet or the Sun directly – but around the "Lagrangian point" the spot where the gravitational pull of Earth and that of the Sun balance each other out. From this vantage point, it will look at the restless solar surface and listen for internal "sun-quakes".

Soho will be followed in May 1996 by Cluster, a quartet of little satellites which, in orbit around Earth, will also be ex-

amining the effects of the Sun as the solar wind – the continuous stream of ionised gas emitted by the Sun – hits Earth's magnetic field. Perhaps the strangest path of all is that taken by the ESA probe, known as Ulysses, which was launched from the shuttle Discovery on 6 October 1990. In order to look at the Sun, it was sent away from the Sun, towards Jupiter. Ulysses sped out to a rendezvous with the planet two years later and used the planet's gravity to shoot up out of the flat disc in

which all planets orbit the Sun. But the Voyager and Pioneer spacecraft have had the longest journeys and are now the most distant man-made objects in the universe. Launched on 2 March 1972, Pioneer 10 was the first of the Jupiter missions. Pioneer 11 followed a year later. The two Voyagers were sent up within a couple of days of each other in 1977. By the late 1970s, the outermost planets of the Solar System were lined up in a curve, so that spacecraft could visit them one after another. Voy-

ager 1 passed Jupiter in March 1979 and Saturn in 1980. Voyager 2 visited Jupiter in July 1979, Saturn in 1981, Uranus in 1986, and Neptune in 1989. They are all now leaving the bounds of the Solar System and passing from interplanetary to interstellar space. They may yet yield one final piece of scientific information. Some scientists believe there might be a 10th planet beyond the orbit of Pluto. It may reveal its gravitational pull by deflecting the trajectories of these distant craft from what is expected. But after that, nothing.

MoD rapped over official's fraud

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

Ministry of Defence officials were hauled over the coals by a powerful committee of MPs yesterday for lapses that led to one of the biggest ever frauds in Whitehall.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee said the case of Gordon Foxley, the former head of ammunition procurement at the MoD, jailed for taking £1.3m, and probably much more, in bribes from three foreign defence manufacturers anxious to secure orders, was "one of the worst cases of corruption" it had examined.

Mr Foxley had several houses, both in Britain and abroad, and luxury cars, yet the MoD failed to spot anything amiss. "We are concerned that the Department's vetting arrangements failed to identify the lavish nature of Gordon Foxley's lifestyle," the committee said.

As a priority, it recommended the Government should introduce the same vetting arrangements for officials in a position to benefit from fraud as already applied to those who could pose a threat to national security.

Procurement staff had been in their jobs for a long period, said MPs, which "can increase the risk of fraud". Postings of five years, or even less, should be the norm. Where that was impossible, management checks should be strengthened.

The Foxley affair is still being investigated by MoD police. The full extent of his corruption is still not known – something MPs found hard to stomach. They urged the MoD to redouble its efforts to identify all the bribes he received – the police think he received far more than £1.3m – and to gain access to his Swiss bank accounts.

MoD claims that total fraud of £22m in the last decade was small, in the context of a total defence budget of £23bn, failed to impress the all-party group of MPs. "We are concerned that in absolute terms very large amounts are involved."

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politics

Monetary union: Prime Minister says nothing can be ruled out

Major keen to retain an option on EMU

DONALD MACINTYRE
Political Editor

John Major yesterday reaffirmed his intention not to rule out British membership of EMU in the next Parliament despite strong pressure from Tory right-wingers to do so.

Although there are mounting doubts among senior British politicians in both the main parties about the likelihood of the 1999 timetable for a single currency being met, the Prime Minister said in the Commons it was "still" Government policy not to rule out British membership in the next Parliament.

The Prime Minister's declaration, in exchanges with Tony Blair, the Labour leader, followed his remarks in an interview with the *Independent* last month that he did not want to "surrender" his influence in negotiations in Europe on the consequences of EMU for countries outside as well as inside a single currency.

The prospect of a White Paper, setting out Britain's negotiating position for the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference on the EU's future further increased yesterday when Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, told the Commons that ministers were now actively considering whether to publish one early next year.

Mr Major's remarks came a week ahead of the Madrid summit, at which Mr Major is expected to press his case that the economic results for countries outside EMU – including the possibility of competitive devaluations – have not been sufficiently thought through.

It also comes on the eve of a fresh campaign by John Redwood, the former Welsh Secretary and Mr Major's leadership challenger in the summer, to persuade the Gov-

ernment to make a further gesture towards the Euro-sceptic right, by explicitly pledging that a Tory government would not join a single currency in the next Parliament.

Mr Major has frequently cast doubt on the likelihood of a single currency before the end of the century. On the Labour side both Mr Blair, and in a BBC Radio interview yesterday, Robin Cook, his foreign affairs spokesman, have also suggested the 1999 timetable could well slip. Mr Cook suggested on the *Today* programme that delay might well be necessary in order to meet the widened economic convergence criteria which a Labour government would be seeking.

Although some ministers on the right believe that further discussions on the subject will have to take place within the Cabinet – and that the Prime Minister could still in the end make such a pledge – Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, is thought to be strongly opposed to such a move. Mr Major is said at present to accept the argument that it would lessen British influence over an issue which is of fundamental importance, even if the UK stays out of EMU.

After saying that Mr Major had made a "very important statement" by not ruling out membership, Mr Blair pressed the Prime Minister to say whether that was the "position of the whole of your Government, including the Euro-sceptic members of the Cabinet?" Mr Major replied: "Of course it is the position of the whole Government."

John Stevens, Tory MEP for Thames Valley, said in London yesterday said yesterday "monetary union is the test of whether Europe is serious about being competitive."



Lethal weapon: Victoria Moule, who is recovering from being seriously injured in a collision involving a vehicle fitted with bull bars, in central London yesterday at the launch of a Labour Party campaign to ban what it describes as a 'dangerous fashion accessory' Photograph: Geraint Lewis

Heath defies party's Euro-sceptics

Sir Edward Heath yesterday swanned the Prime Minister that the task of negotiating for Britain would be made "impossible" if the Government bowed to the Euro-sceptics and issued a White Paper on Europe.

Reinforcing the belief that the Tory sceptics are now the tail that wags the Government dog, within hours of Sir Teddy Taylor commending the idea of a White Paper on the *Today* programme, John Major told the Commons he was considering publishing one.

The document would set out Britain's position on the various issues to come before next year's Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) on the future of the European Union.

But in a trenchant speech in which he also called for speedy

creation of a single currency, Sir Edward appealed to the Prime Minister "under no circumstances" to make a statement on the British position. "I have had many, many years of international negotiations and five years of negotiating in Europe. It is impossible for any prime minister to lay down before hand what he is going to do."

Sir Edward said there was a long tradition, "broken in recent years", of ministers negotiating what they thought was an acceptable deal and then bringing it back for MPs' approval. "If they are not approved, that's the end of the government."

Sir Edward backed the social chapter and the minimum wage – the effect of both had been "grossly exaggerated" – and membership of a European single currency.

Inside Parliament

Stephen Goodwin

Heckled by sceptics who would like a Government commitment not to join at all, he said that ever since its creation the community had moved forward in considerable leaps, and it would do so on the currency. "The sooner this is done the better."

Sir Edward's strictures were greeted with wooden expressions by Foreign Office ministers. Mr Rifkind looked at his shoes and stroked his trousers

as Sir Edward deplored the readiness to be "isolated" about which the Secretary of State had boasted.

"We are kidding ourselves if we say they all want to do what we're doing. It couldn't be further from the truth. They are saying just how lucky they are to be saved from it."

Within the Tory party, however, it is Sir Edward who is looking increasingly isolated. He did at least have the support of Edwina Currie, chairman of the Conservative Group for Europe. "It isn't true that all Conservatives are anti-Europe, very far from it," she insisted.

With the IGC agenda due for discussion at the Madrid summit next week, Mr Rifkind said Britain would welcome a conference that strengthened practical co-operation where it was

necessary and showed "a renewed determination that the EU should stay out of areas where it isn't necessary."

He said the next few years would be as important as any in Europe's history though he predicted that negotiations over the entry of the first central and eastern European countries could take five or six years.

On the vexed business of a single currency, Mr Rifkind said it was clear that if monetary union was to go ahead on 1 January 1999, only a minority of states would be ready. The implications of this had yet to be examined.

"Therefore there is a crucial need for work to begin now, not in 1997 or 1998, as to what will be the implications for the relationship between the 'ins' and the 'outs' in such a situation."

Labour 'to make football a sport for all'

JOHN RENTOUL
Political Correspondent

Labour lined up an array of high-powered endorsements for its Football Charter yesterday, to back the party's claim to speak for "the national game". Jimmy Hill, the television pundit and chairman of Fulham FC, applauded Labour's plans to crack down on British football hooligans abroad and to reform the bodies which run the sport. "To achieve even half of its good intentions in office would be miraculous," he said. He singled out for particular welcome "the concern about uncivilised behaviour both on and off the field, the encouragement for the Football Association to streamline its organisation and for a wider spread of wealth throughout the entire game".

Most of the leading figures in the sport came to hear Jack Cunningham, Labour's national heritage spokesman, launch the party's charter at a Westminster news conference. The plans were welcomed by David Davies, of the FA, Rick Parry, of the Premier League, David Dent, of the Football League, representatives of the two main supporters' organisations and the Professional Footballers' Association.

Mr Cunningham said Labour would attempt to amend the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill to ensure that "major sporting events", including the FA Cup Final, would be protected for viewing by all.

Mr Cunningham said: "We want football genuinely to be a 'sport for all'. One of our first priorities on taking office would be to establish a task force which would report within one year."

The charter proposes a number of legal changes to clamp down on violent or racist supporters, including increasing the punishments for failing to comply with restriction orders, designed to keep persistent offenders out of football grounds.

A spokesman for the Department of National Heritage said the Government had taken "a leading role" in tackling football hooliganism.

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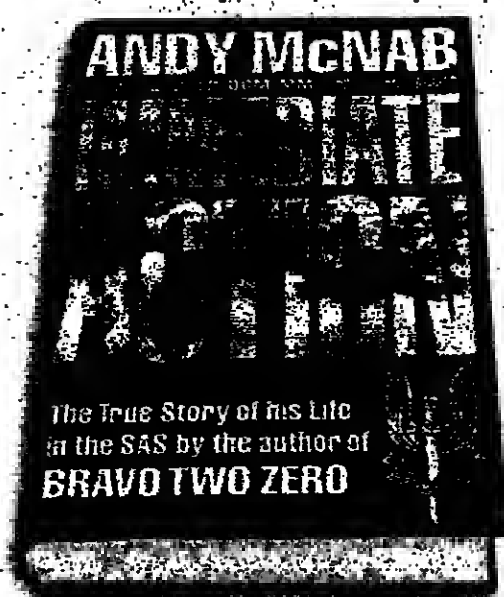
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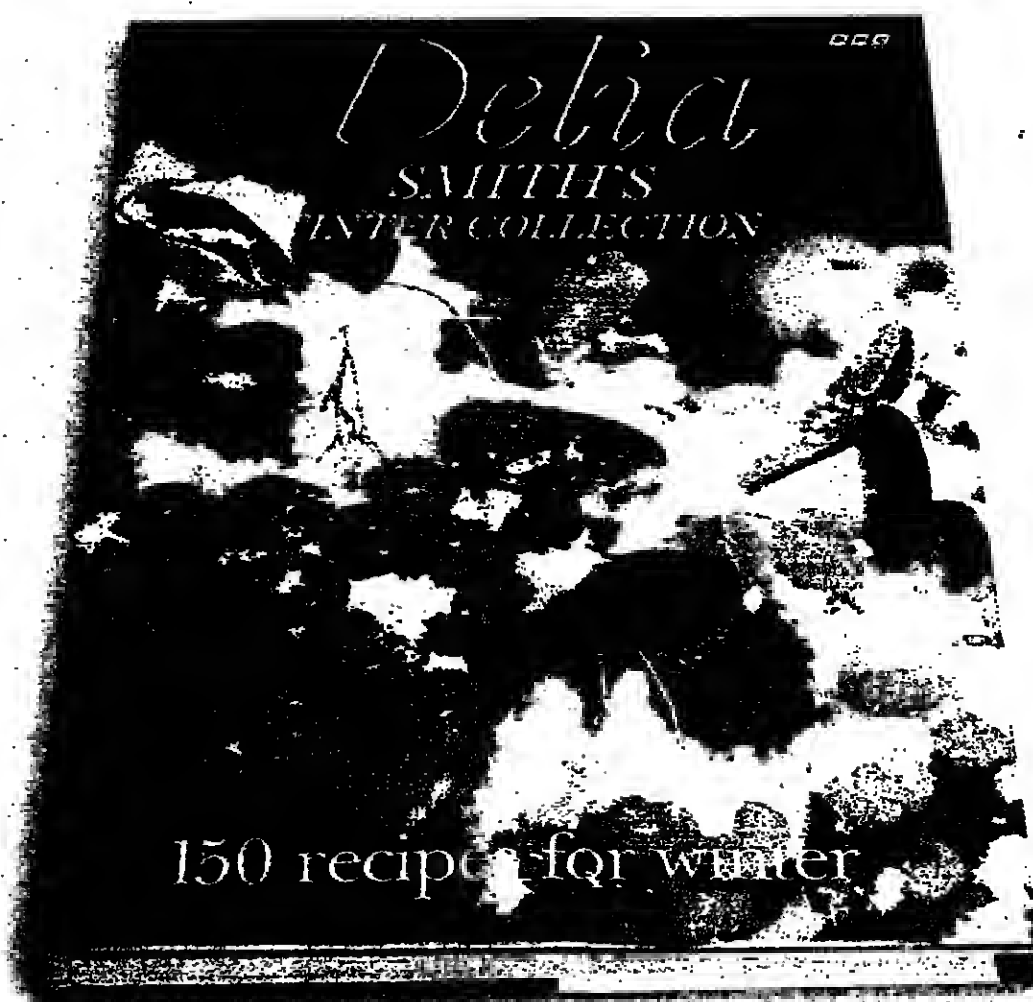
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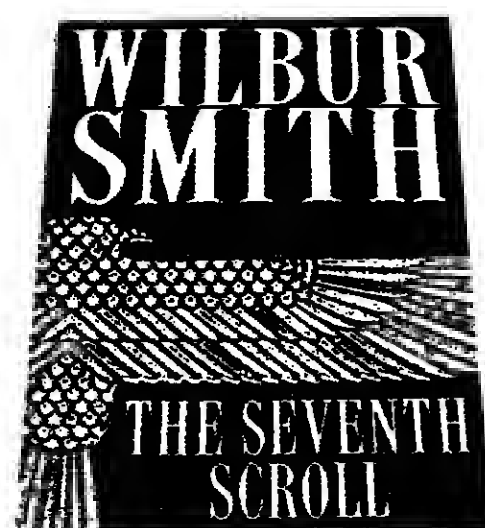
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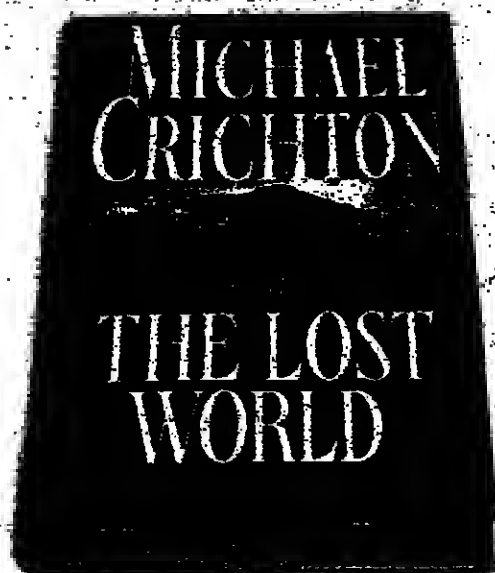
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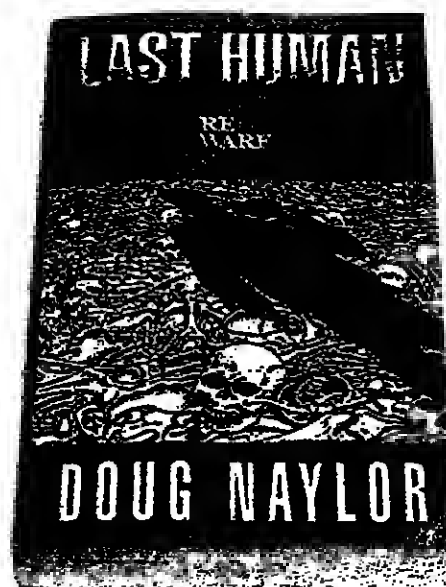
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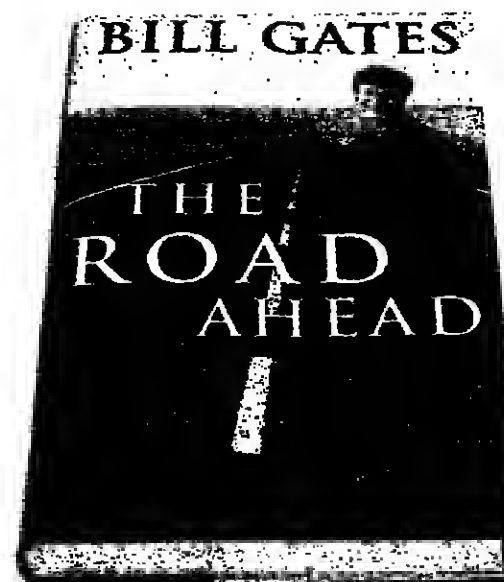
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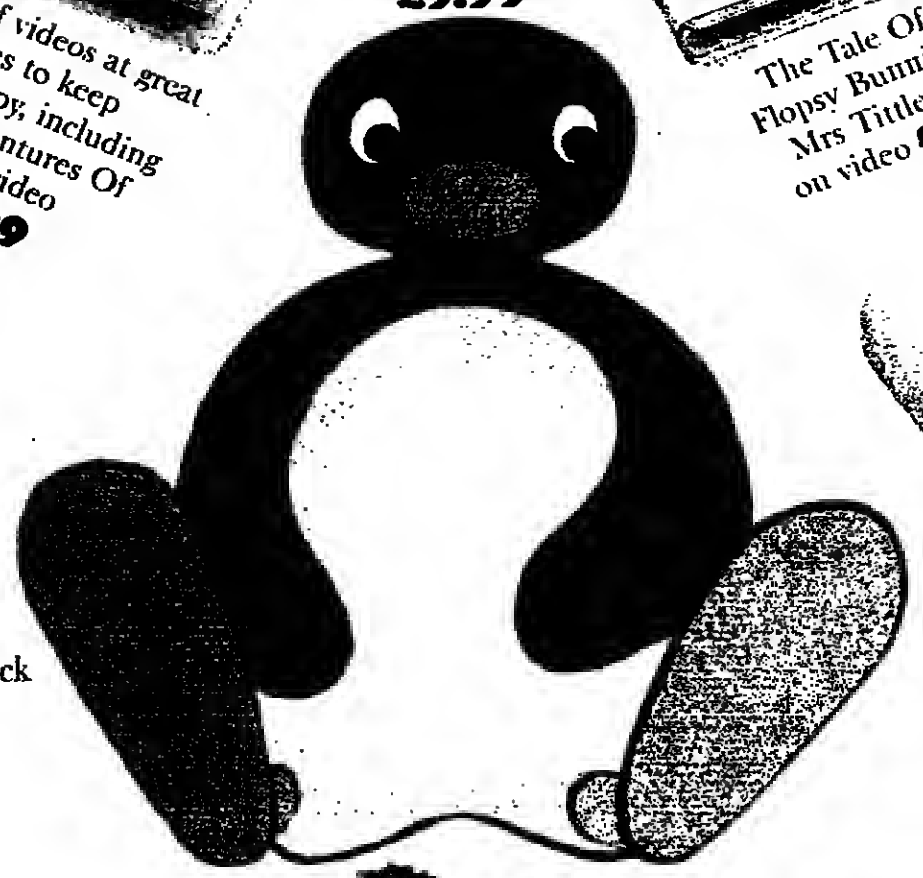


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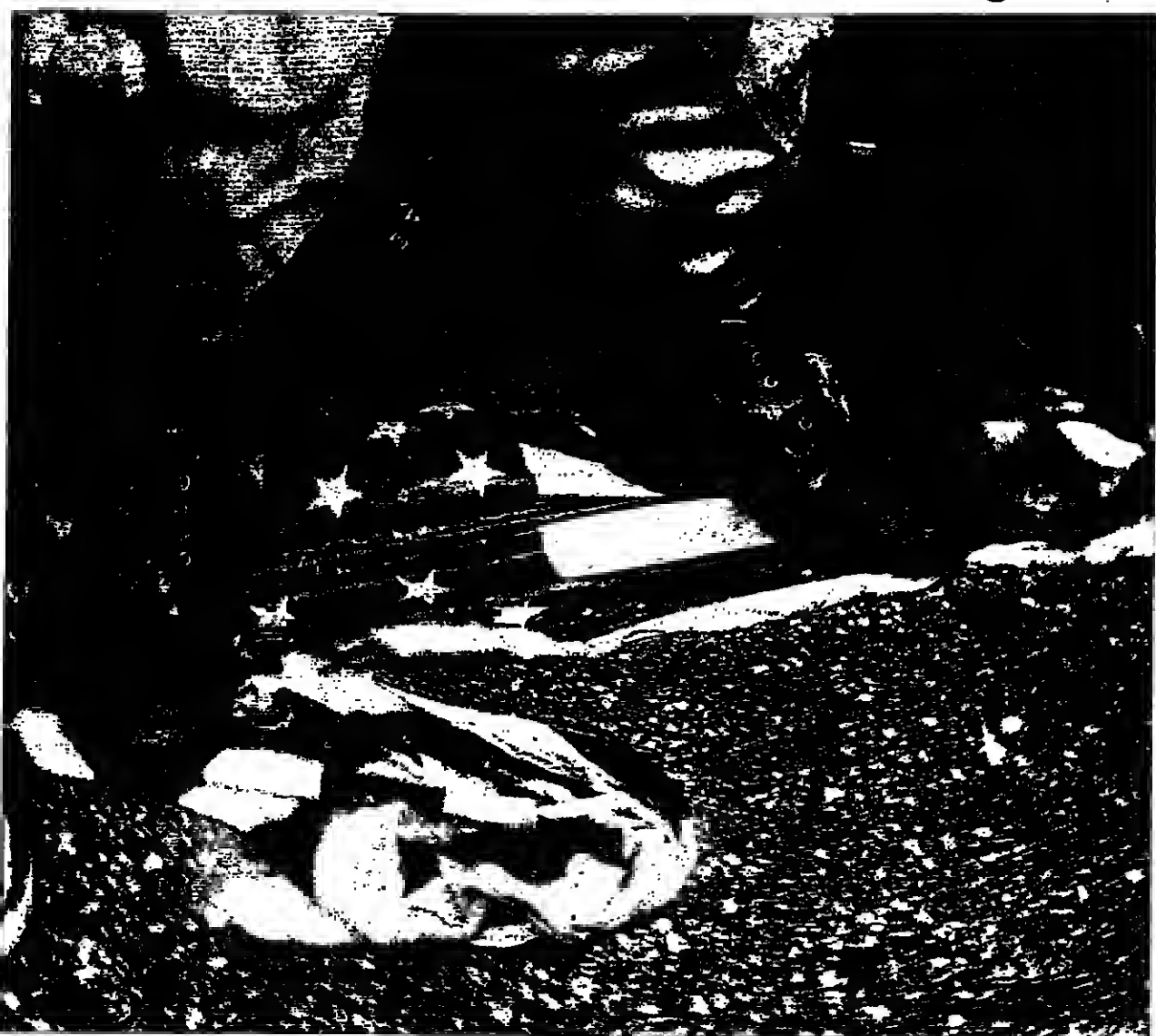
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Bosnia accord: Focus shifts to London as ministers gather to determine strategy for implementing agreement



Order of the boot: A militiaman tramples a US flag during a demonstration yesterday in a Serbian suburb of Sarajevo in protest against the peace plan which transfers control to the Muslim-led government. Photograph: AP

Nations seek to shore up peace

MICHAEL SHERIDAN
 Diplomatic Editor
ADRIAN BRIDGE
 Budapest

Foreign ministers will mount an informal effort to resolve the dispute between Serbia and Croatia over the region of eastern Slavonia at the Peace Implementation Conference on the former Yugoslavia, opening in London today.

The discussions are expected to take place in the margins of formal sessions on the military and civilian efforts to carry out the Dayton peace accords, which set out the terms for an end to the war in Bosnia.

European ministers are keen to use the opportunity also to defuse the issue of eastern Slavonia, a border area of Croatia occupied by separatist Serbs. Under the Dayton formula the region is to be ruled by an international authority for up to two years, after which time it will revert to Croatian sovereignty. But the process could be delayed by the absence of any agreement to protect the status of Serbs remaining in the area, and there are also other areas of disagreement.

"The eastern Slavonia ques-

tion could still set off a war between Serbia and Croatia unless it is resolved," said a Western diplomat, "and it is the kind of side issue that could disrupt the whole settlement in Bosnia".

The ministers will also be expected to agree on a new structure of military and civilian relations in the international effort in Bosnia, hoping to avoid the bureaucratic conflicts which bedevilled the failed United Nations mission.

Although discussions on military arrangements are taking place at Nato in Brussels, the London conference is certain to provide a forum for political tensions to surface, particularly between France and the US.

The French government, whose troops will man the Sarajevo sector, has already expressed concern over the provision in the Dayton accords for the Muslim-led government to take over Serb suburbs of the capital. While partly fed by worries over the fate of two French airmen presumed to be in Serb hands, the issue could still cause sharp disagreement among the Western allies.

The foreign ministers are likely to agree on the appointment of the European Union

negotiator, Carl Bildt, as the first High Representative to co-ordinate civilian relief, reconstruction, the protection of human rights and the holding of elections.

The 53-nation Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) met yesterday in Budapest to discuss its mandate to supervise the preparation and conduct of elections for the presidency and legislature of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The polls are to be held within six to nine months of the formal signature of peace agreement in Paris on 14 December.

"We have never taken on anything like this before," said a Western delegate. "Success would greatly enhance the OSCE's credibility. But if we fail it could all be called into question." Another said: "The Clinton administration has put itself on the line with this peace plan. They do not want it to be an empty piece of paper - particularly if US troops are going to be getting involved."

The OSCE plans to establish offices throughout the Muslim-Croat and Serb areas of Bosnia. A \$24.5m budget has been earmarked, and it will employ 200-300 monitoring experts.

UN looks on as Croats burn and loot homes

Sarajevo (Reuters) — The United Nations yesterday defended its failure to intervene in parts of Bosnia where Croat forces are systematically burning and looting towns, and said it did not think Nato troops, in similar circumstances, would get involved.

British forces currently deployed in these areas as UN peace-keepers will remain on the ground for Nato when it deploys later this month.

"If you look at our mandate, our interpretation is we were not sent here to stop civil populations burning down their own houses," said Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Vernon, the UN spokesman.

About 60,000 Nato combat troops are scheduled to be deployed in Bosnia to implement a peace plan initiated in Dayton, Ohio, last month and due to be signed in Paris next Thursday. Nato will bring bigger guns, better armour and artillery and more robust rules of engagement, mostly for defensive purposes.

With the UN packing up and Nato just arriving, Bosnia has been left to its own devices - with predictable consequences.

The Croats have burned down 40 per cent of Mrkonjic Grad and Sipovo, towns scheduled to revert to Serb control after the peace plan is signed. The arson and looting is being carried out by uniformed soldiers, much of it under the eyes of British troops whom the UN has ordered to observe but not to interfere.

Bosnian Serb leaders, some of them indicted war criminals supposed to have stepped down under the Dayton deal, are rejecting the agreement as it calls for them to hand Sarajevo's northern and western suburbs to government control.

Serb troops are also blocking UN-escorted civilian convoys in Gorazde, in defiance of a pledge made in October in exchange for a halt to Nato air strikes. And Serbs are continuing to drive Muslims from their homes - 60 families this week alone in the Banja Luka region - despite the fact that the Dayton accord "guarantees" the rights of minorities to stay in their property.

"Nato will be in an invidious position no matter what it does," said a relief worker. "If it lets the locals take things into their own hands, hardline Croats and Serbs will scuttle the Dayton agreement. If Nato tries to become an occupying force, which may be what is necessary to make the deal work, it could well get sucked into the quagmire it vowed to avoid."

Washington (AP) — Nearly half the House of Representatives signed a letter to President Bill Clinton opposing the deployment of US troops to Bosnia, even as he formally notified Congress yesterday that the first Americans had landed. In their one-sentence letter, 184 members - 171 Republicans and 13 Democrats - wrote: "We urge you not to send ground troops to Bosnia."

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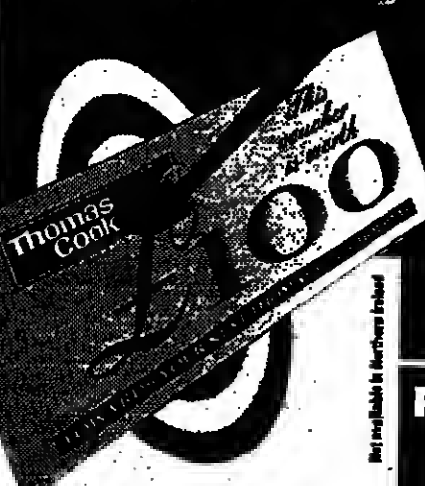
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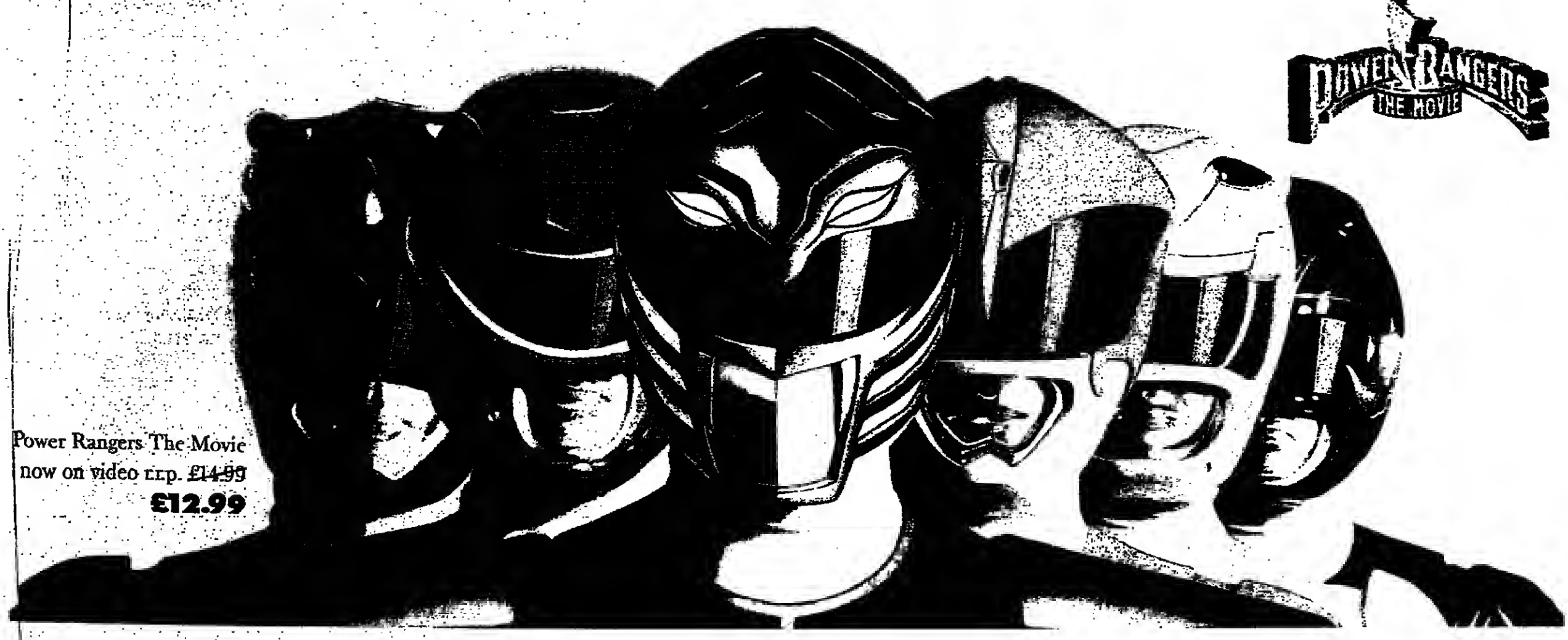
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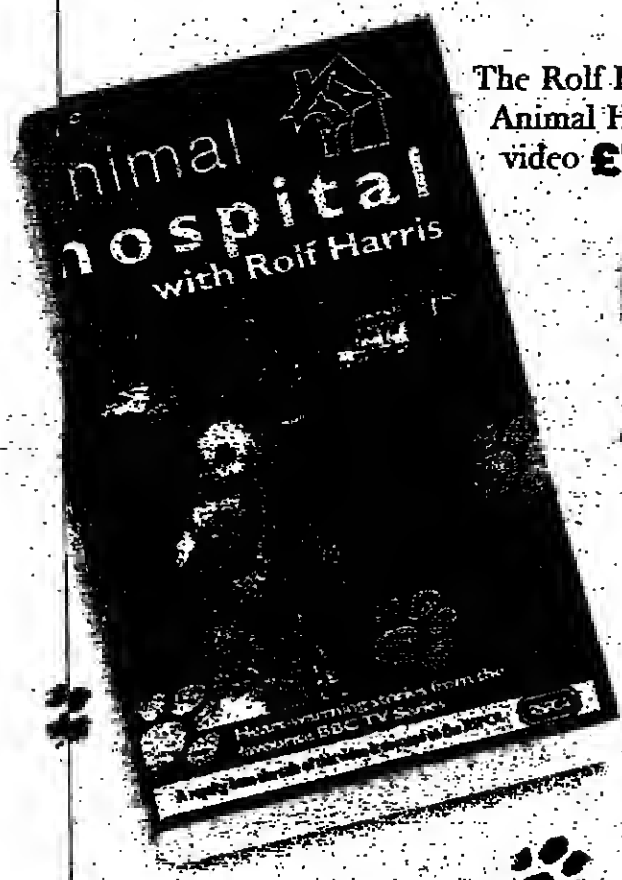


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international

Russian elections: Hit hard by privatisation, the professional classes are wooed by a whizz-kid economist and a former PM

Reformers face legacy of hate

HELEN WOMACK
Moscow

Had Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the whizz-kid economist Grigory Yavlinsky to try out his ambitious plan to privatise the Soviet economy in 500 days, Mr Yavlinsky would hardly be the popular politician he is today. But the father of perestroika delayed introducing economic reform, passing the buck to Boris Yeltsin and his chosen young economist, Yegor Gaidar.

Mr Gaidar and his team plunged in - dubbed the "boys in pink pants" because, in their 30s, they were young to be in government - and took the colossal risk of freeing prices after decades of state control. That was back in January 1992, at the start of Russia's transformation to capitalism.

Naturally Mr Gaidar made mistakes, and got his hands dirty. Now he is a hate figure for many Russians, and his party, Russia's Democratic Choice-United Democrats (RDC-UD), will be lucky if it gains enough votes in parliamentary elections on Sunday week to pass the 5-per-cent threshold to enter the assembly.

During the painful reforms, Mr Yavlinsky sat on the sidelines, criticising and keeping an unsullied reputation. Now he is seen as one of the few politicians worth a vote by those electors who want to prevent a Communist landslide or the rise of ugly nationalists. His Yabloko party appears consistently in second place behind the Communist front-runner in the opinion polls. If it does indeed do well, Mr Yavlinsky, 43, will use his success at parliamentary level to propel himself into the race for president next June.

The parliamentary-election shock of two years ago was the victory of the extreme nationalist, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and his misleadingly named Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Liberals in the Western sense of the word, including Mr Gaidar and Mr Yavlinsky, wrung their hands and vowed to unite against the threat of fascism.

But the two politicians, who are really very close in their world outlook, differing only on economic technicalities, have failed again to pool their efforts. There was talk of them entering an alliance earlier this year,

but a personality clash evidently wrecked the plan. Of course, Mr Gaidar needed Mr Yavlinsky more than Mr Yavlinsky needed Mr Gaidar.

It was not always so. In 1992, Mr Gaidar was Prime Minister while Mr Yavlinsky was out in the provinces, advising on local privatisation schemes. Under Mr Gaidar prices rocketed, but a market did begin to develop, and the shops, which had been catastrophically empty in the winter of 1991-92, filled up with goods.

The Soviet-era Russian parliament howled in protest at the social cost of the changes, and in December 1992 President Yeltsin was forced to drop his protégé and replace him with Viktor Chernomyrdin, the present Prime Minister. Mr Chernomyrdin, as leader of the "Our Home is Russia" movement, is now trying to persuade voters to persevere with reforms in order to reap the benefits.

But Mr Gaidar has withdrawn his support from the government, because of last December's military intervention in Chechnya. He now works closely with the respected human rights campaigner,

Sergei Kovalyov, and if his party, with the uninspiring slogan "Be rational, say da to Gaidar", wins any votes, it is likely to be because of his strong stance over Chechnya.

Mr Yavlinsky, more charismatic than the pudgy-faced Mr Gaidar, also opposes the war in Chechnya, but his main argu-

ment with the government is over economic policy. Mr Chernomyrdin has paid special attention to the energy sector, but Mr Yavlinsky believes the emphasis should be on small businesses, so that Russia develops a healthy middle class.

While other parties are spending lavishly on television

advertising campaigns, Yabloko found some free publicity in the autumn when election bureaucrats disqualified it on a technicality. The Supreme Court re-instated Yabloko, but not before Mr Yavlinsky had achieved martyr status.

The intelligentsia is the "constituency" being wooed by

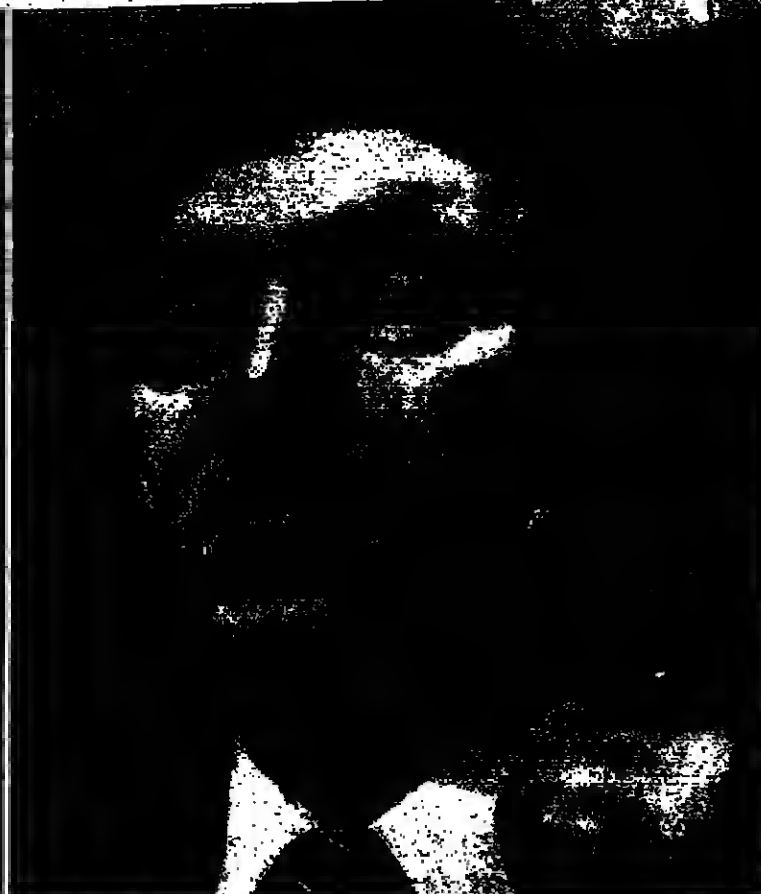
Yabloko, which means apple in Russian and also combines letters from the surnames of the founding members, Mr Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev, a corruption fighter, and Vladimir Lukin, a former ambassador to the US.

Yabloko does indeed seem to attract professionals, such as teachers, doctors, scientists and

artists, who have suffered from the loss of state subsidised housing or the crude sobriety of the nationalists.

They have been hurt, reform, but have not come to lose hope in its efficacy. Mr Yavlinsky's untried will turn out to be less so.

Separate ways: The ex-Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar (left) and Grigory Yavlinsky differ only on economic technicalities as they run for parliament



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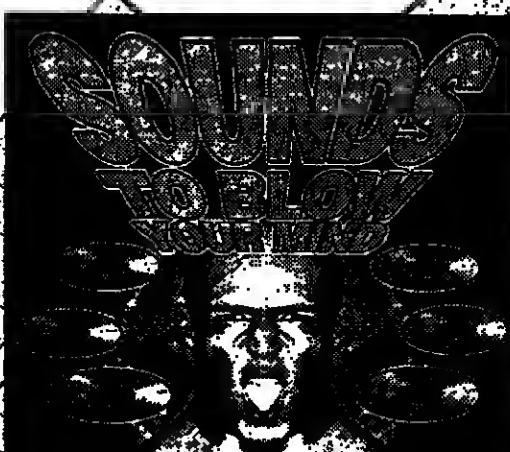
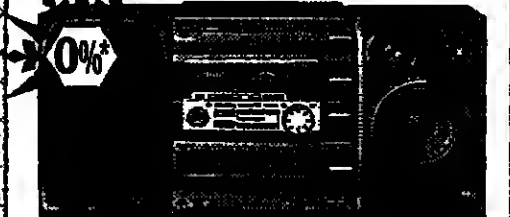


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Communists at bay

Moscow - In the new capitalist Russia, where the ability to make fast money counts more than professional qualifications, Irina Glushenkova, a concert pianist, has found herself impoverished, writes Helen Womack.

Yet Ms Glushenkova is not nostalgic for Communism, which would have guaranteed her a living. On the contrary, she is considering how best to use her vote to make sure the Communists, favourites in the coming parliamentary elections, do not return to power.

Ms Glushenkova is a graduate of the once-prestigious Moscow Conservatory. The state gave her a free education at the highest level and, had the Soviet system of subsidising the arts continued, she could have expected a career as a performer. Instead, she went out into a world that does not value her skills. The bankrupt state can no longer support her, while most Russian businessmen have yet to mature to the point where they sponsor culture.

The 32-year-old pianist survives by teaching easy tunes to infants in a private school patronised by rich Russians. For this, she earns the equivalent of

£96 a month, which does not go far now that many govt al Western prices.

Ms Glushenkova lives with her mother and grandchild in a cramped flat in a working-class suburb of Moscow. The bitter about this, because the family had a spacious dacha house which the Communists confiscated.

This is one reason Ms Glushenkova will vote Communist. Another is, despite having gained little in material terms from reform, she has benefited from theater freedom in Russia. "I don't want to go back to totalitarianism," she says, so she votes strategically in an attempt to block the Communists as Russian nationalists.

Ms Glushenkova is faced by the plethora of parties offering themselves, but moving towards a decision. Free marketeers who have already been in government are rejected, because of the price they have caused. But this another reformer who remains untried, and Ms Glushenkova will probably give a chance Grigory Yavlinsky and his Yabloko (Apple) grouping.

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argument

No significant risk from beef

As the debate about BSE continues, we print the second of two contributions from eminent scientists. **Robert Will** argues that the chance of disease crossing to humans is minimal

Professor Blakemore's article in yesterday's *Independent* provided a concise discussion of the evidence relating to the possibility that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) might cause a spongiform encephalopathy in the human population. Although most scientists would agree that there is a remote theoretical risk from BSE, no link between BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) has yet been demonstrated and the emphasis in

Professor Blakemore's conclusions on a risk in relation to beef is, in my view, misleading and almost certainly wrong.

Transmission by the oral route in these diseases is extremely inefficient, requiring exposure to large doses of infectivity. In kuru, the brain disease found among New Guinea people and referred to by Professor Blakemore, women and children were predominantly affected because they were exposed to tissues,

including brain, containing high levels of infectivity, in the course of ritual cannibalism.

Furthermore, the transmission of kuru may have been due to infection through abrasions in the skin rather than through oral consumption of human tissues. There is no good evidence of detectable infectivity in muscle in any prion disease, including BSE, and the BSE agent, like scrapie, may well not be a risk to the human population at all.

The transmission of BSE to a number of species, including domestic cats and captive zoo animals, was almost certainly due to the dietary exposure of

these species to foodstuffs containing brain and spinal cord from cattle, tissues that have high levels of infectivity. Professor Blakemore is wrong to sug-

gest that beef products were the likely cause of cross-species transmission of BSE, as detectable infectivity has been found only in brain and spinal cord

in natural cases of BSE. The crucial issue is the level of exposure to infection and this may be the reason why BSE has transmitted to other species rather than implying a more potent infectious agent. It is of note that there are many zoo species which must have been exposed to BSE through foodstuffs but have not developed a spongiform encephalopathy.

From the perspective of human health, it is clearly essential that people are not exposed to levels of infection that might cause disease, if the BSE agent were a risk to man. The specified bovine offals (SBO) ban introduced in 1989 has ensured that brain and spinal cord, together with other tissues that might theoretically contain significant infectivity, are excluded from the human food chain. It is clearly essential that the SBO ban is applied rigorously and that any possibility of failure of the SBO ban is promptly and appropriately dealt with.

The possibility of vertical transmission of prion disease is "frightening", as Professor Blakemore suggests, not least to those individuals at greater

Even if the BSE agent were a risk to man, oral transmission would require very high levels of infectivity

risk of CJD; for example, recipients of human pituitary-derived hormones. However, there is no good evidence of maternal transmission of CJD, or kuru, nor indeed of any other prion disease. The long-held view that scrapie was transmitted maternally has recently been vigorously challenged and epidemiological evidence suggests that if vertical transmission of BSE occurs at all, this must be at a very low rate.

It is likely that the occurrence of BSE in animals "born after the ban" is related to continued exposure to contaminated cattle feed rather than to maternal transmission. As Professor Blakemore points out, the incubation period in CJD is not known. However, in kuru, the minimum incubation period was four years and the maximum more than 30 years; in the tragic cases of accidental transmission of CJD through contaminated pituitary hormones, the mean incubation period is approximately 13 years.

In all prion diseases, the route of exposure influences the incubation period; as pituitary hormones were given by injection, it is reasonable to presume that less efficient oral exposure would result in a significantly longer incubation period. One implication is that if a link between BSE and CJD were established, this would reflect exposures that took place perhaps 10-15 years ago, ie, before the SBO ban and perhaps before BSE was even identified.

The recent upsurge in interest in CJD has been prompted by a number of factors: an increase in the total number of cases of CJD in the UK, the occurrence of CJD in four

farmers with potential occupational exposure to BSE, and identification of two cases of CJD in teenagers. The incidence of CJD remains similar to other countries in Europe and also elsewhere, indicating there is no relative increase. The incidence of CJD in the UK that can be attributed to BSE is similar to the UK. Again, there appears to be no increased relative risk in the UK to farmers that can be related to BSE.

The occurrence of CJD in teenagers is tragic, but cases of CJD in teenagers have been described previously in other countries where there cannot be a link with BSE. There is also the possibility that cases of CJD in younger patients may previously have been missed because of misdiagnosis. In Poland, three young patients with CJD were thought to be suffering from the rare measles-related disease SSPE, which shares many of the clinical features of CJD.

In my opinion, there is a risk of over-interpreting small numbers of cases, and statistical analysis may be unreliable. In the United States in the Eighties, two primary school teachers developed CJD within a few months, having taught in the same school, and "clusters" of cases of CJD have been described in a number of countries over the past 20 years.

There are limitations to the epidemiological study of a rare disease as it may be impossible to assess the significance of minor changes, although continued surveillance of CJD will allow any major change to be identified, particularly if comparisons with other countries without BSE continue.

It is also important to consider whether any other mechanism may allow the source of infection in individual cases of CJD to be identified. Transmission studies in mice may provide further evidence on agent source in specific cases; such studies are already under way.

No link between BSE and CJD has been established, but the possibility of such a link cannot be excluded for many years because of the long incubation period in these diseases. In my view, the possibility of such a link remains theoretical, but even if the BSE agent were a risk to man, oral transmission would require exposure to high levels of infectivity, as in kuru.

This is why the SBO ban is so important and why I believe the risk from eating beef is negligible. I agree with much of Professor Blakemore's article, but I do not believe it is reasonable to conclude that there is significant risk from eating beef; I have therefore not altered my consumption of beef or beef products, and neither have any of my colleagues at the CJD Surveillance Unit.

The writer is head of the CJD Surveillance Unit at Edinburgh's Western General Hospital



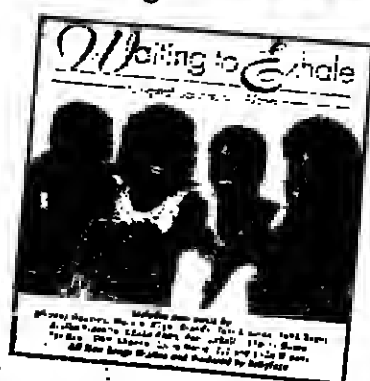
Contaminated cattle feed is the most likely reason for the continuing occurrence of BSE in farm animals

Photograph: Brian Ha

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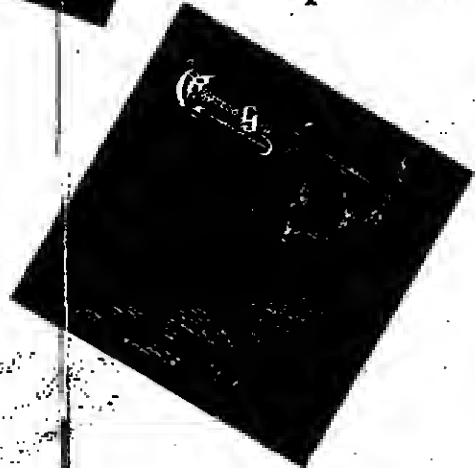
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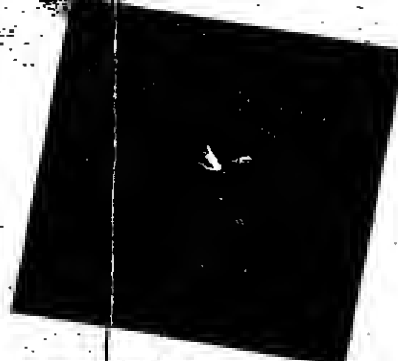
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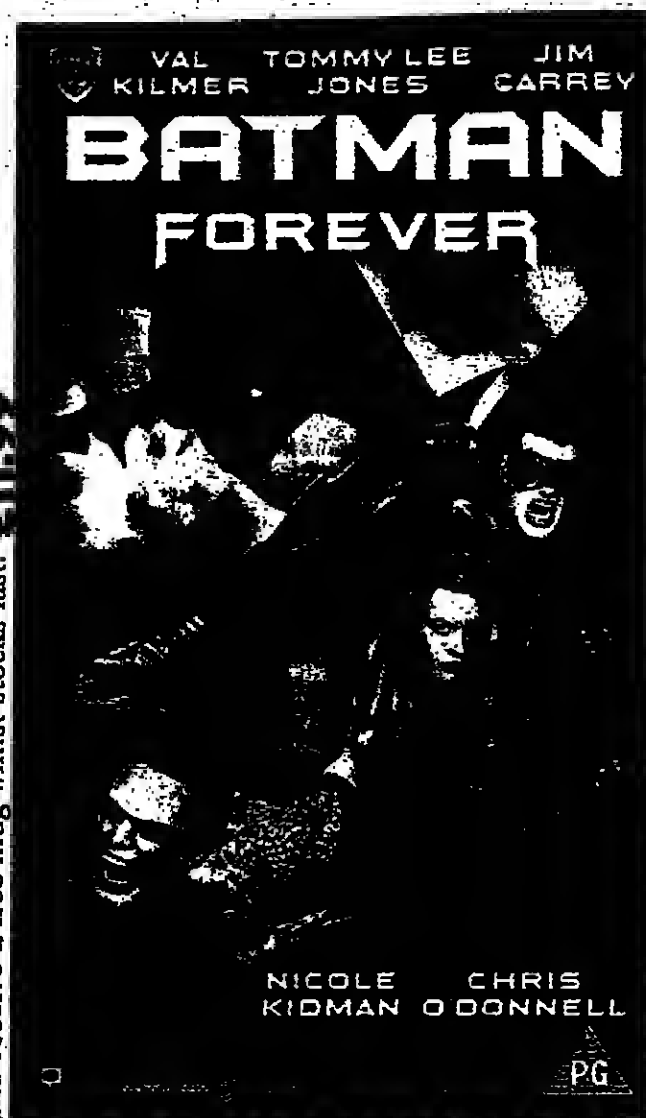
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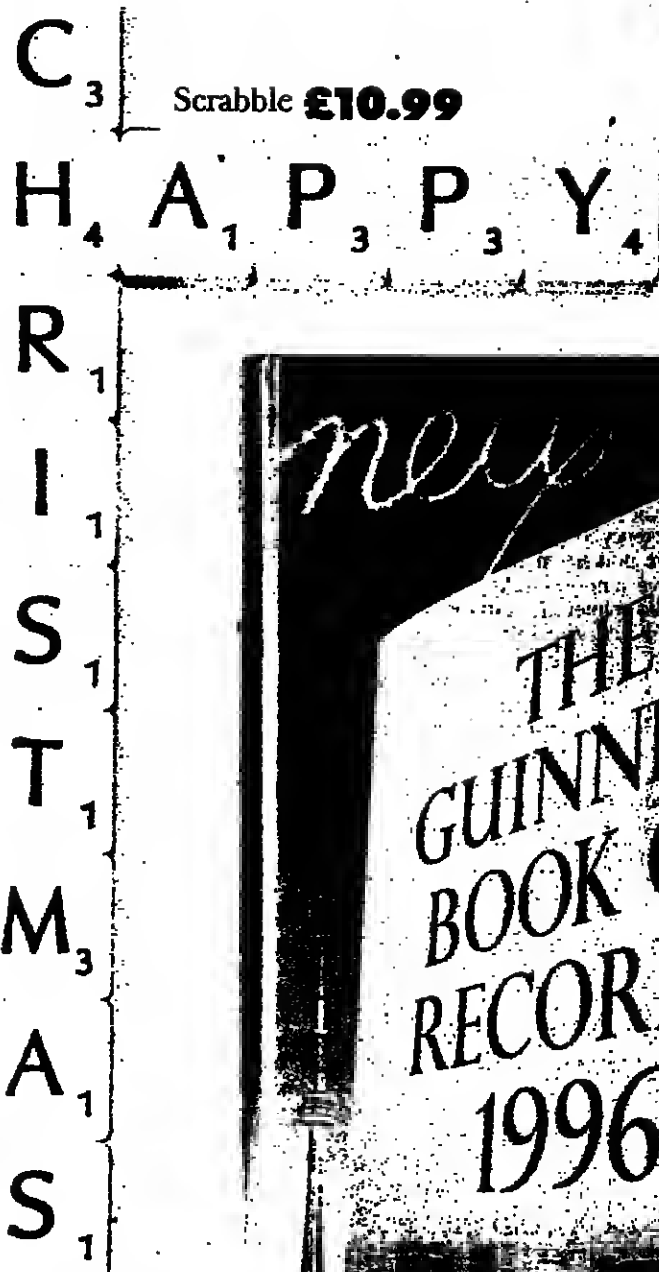
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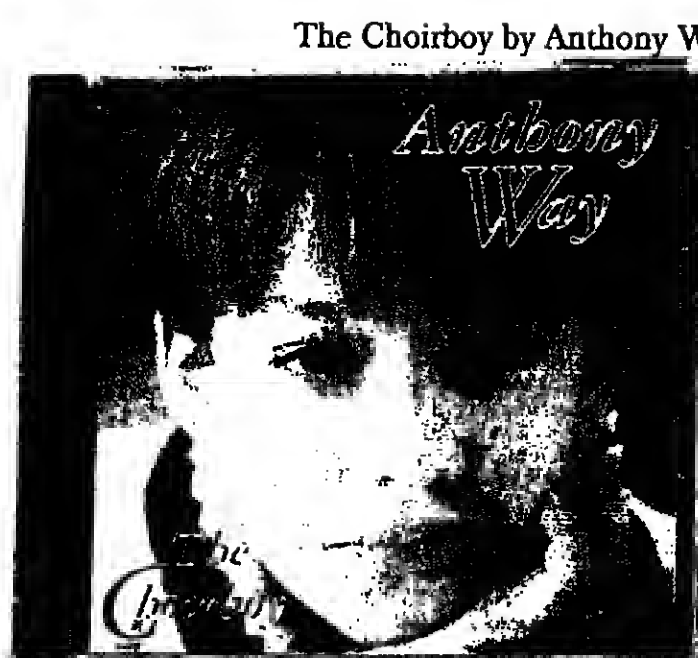


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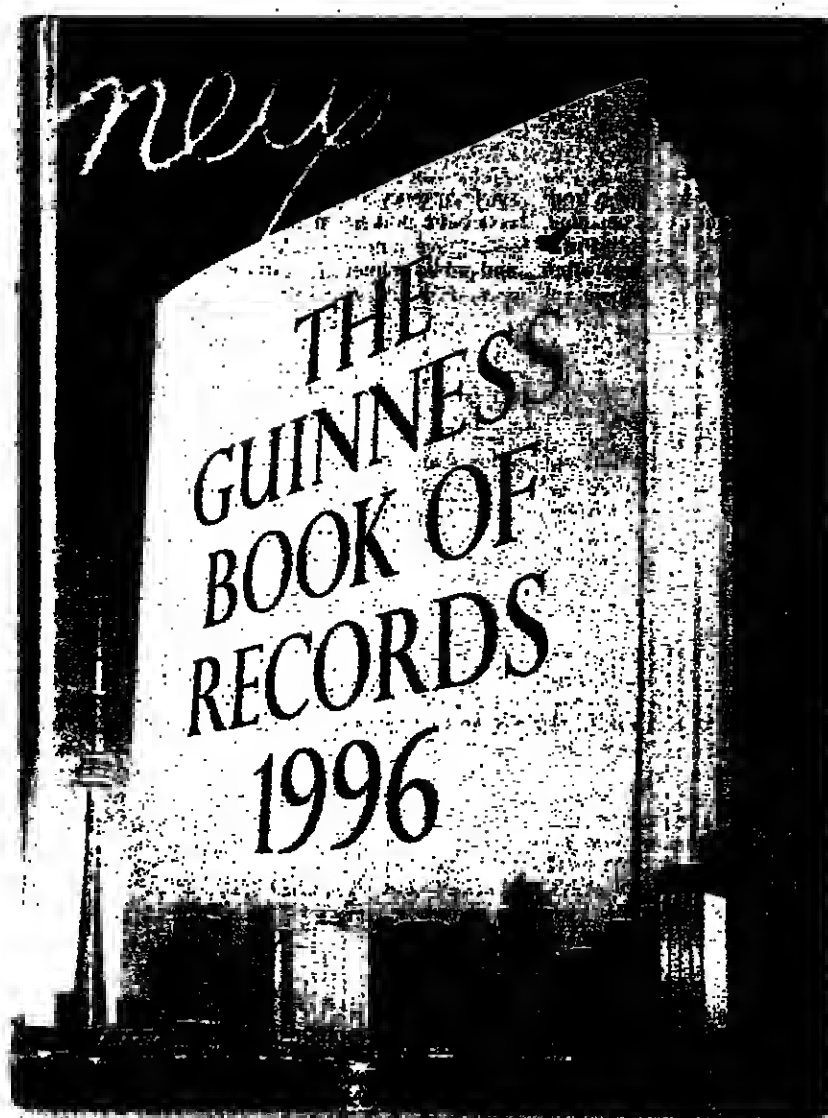


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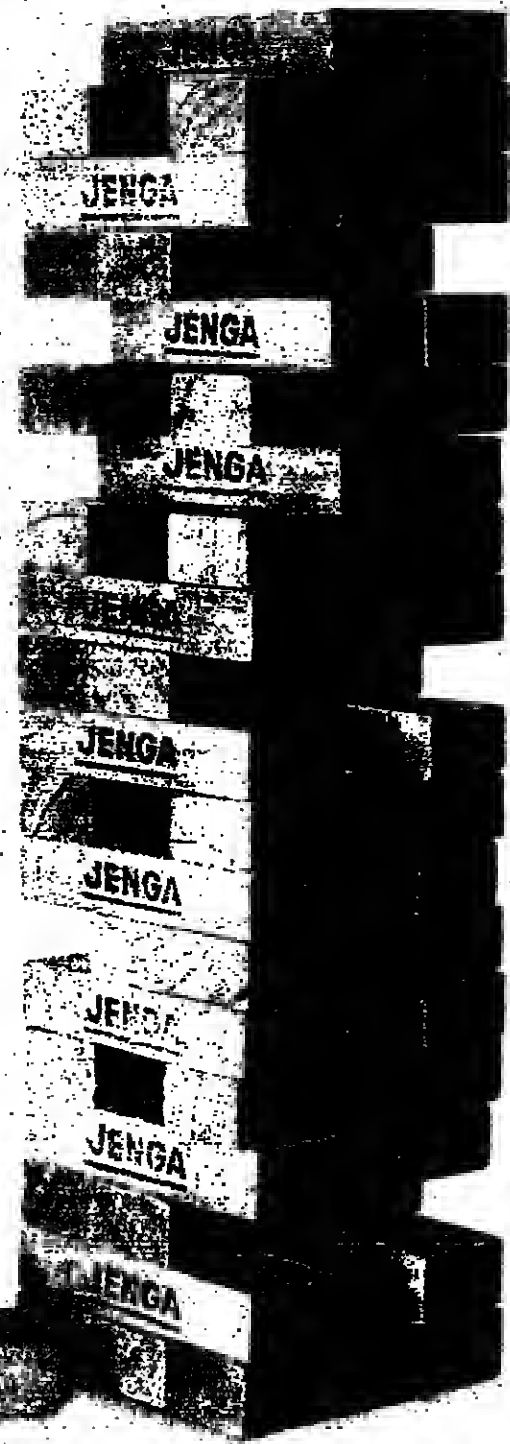
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news analysis

Which member states will be ready for EMU?	Austria	Belgium	Britain	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden
Official government attitude towards EMU	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Has an opt-out clause	Has an opt-out clause	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed	Publicly committed
Who nationally would meet the criteria for joining the EMU by 1999?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes. Total debt currently above Maastricht limit but deemed to be coming down at an acceptable rate	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Who will meet the criteria for joining the EMU in 1999?	Probable	Probable	Possible	Probable	Possible	Possible	Probable	Unlikely	Probable	Unlikely	Probable	Probable	Unlikely	Unlikely	Possible
What each country needs to do in order to qualify for EMU	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Nothing. Borrowing and debt at an acceptable level	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Nothing. Borrowing and debt at an acceptable level	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt	Reduce borrowing together with total debt
Do you agree or disagree with EMU replacing the national currency?	86.8% agreed, 13.2% disagreed	82.5% agreed, 17.5% disagreed	81.9% agreed, 18.1% disagreed	81.4% agreed, 18.6% disagreed	76.0% agreed, 24.0% disagreed	88.8% agreed, 11.2% disagreed	36.8% agreed, 63.2% disagreed	80.4% agreed, 19.6% disagreed	60.5% agreed, 39.5% disagreed	79.3% agreed, 20.7% disagreed	84.7% agreed, 15.3% disagreed	57.6% agreed, 42.4% disagreed	49.8% agreed, 50.2% disagreed	69.6% agreed, 30.4% disagreed	33.6% agreed, 66.4% disagreed

Is 1999 disappearing into the 21st century?

Tony Barber looks at the ramifications if European monetary union is not in place by the deadline set at Maastricht

How satisfying it must feel this week to be a Tory Eurosceptic. France's social unrest is only the latest of several developments in the European Union that appear, in the eyes of the anti-European right, to support the argument that it would be deeply wrong to proceed with the planned launch of a single currency in January 1999.

Eurosceptics are confident not just that they have shifted the domestic political debate about Europe, to the point where British participation in monetary union is unthinkable, but that the debate on the Continent is also moving in their direction. They claim to see more and more evidence that European policy-makers, provoked by public opinion, are abandoning the ambition of launching the single currency in 1999 and may even ditch the project altogether.

Clearly, a growing number of politicians, bankers, industrialists, trade unionists and media pundits across the Continent are having doubts about whether European monetary union (Emu) can start on

schedule. However, most would profoundly disagree with the notion that they have something in common with what, in their eyes, is the negative Euro-phobia of the English nationalist Tory right.

For example, Italy's Prime

No one in international finance and business is yet taking monetary union for granted

Minister, Lamberto Dini, who is one of the very few continental leaders to have expressed public concern about the 1999 deadline for Emu, nevertheless sees himself as a committed European in heart and soul. When he agreed with John Major in Florence last

Wednesday that the EU must carefully study the impact of a single currency on participating and non-participating states, he was not looking for a formula to strangle Emu before it is born.

Officially, 13 of the EU's 15 states are dedicated to monetary union. In a 14th, Denmark, political leaders would like to join where it not that public opinion forced them in 1992 to obtain an opt-out clause from the Maastricht treaty deadline. Unhappily for the Tory Eurosceptics, they are less often viewed on the Continent as trend-setters than as troglodytes.

Yet it has become increasingly clear this year that the launch of Emu in January 1999 is by no means a foregone conclusion. Uncertainty about the prospects for a single currency dominate the economic and market analyses published by leading European investment houses. No one in the world of international finance and business is yet taking monetary union for granted.

It is a different story in the European Commission, whose

president, Jacques Santer, recently poured scorn on the intellectual prowess of Neil Kinnock, the transport commissioner, for suggesting Emu might not happen on schedule in 1999. However, it is a reasonable guess that Mr Kinnock's only offence was to say in public what Mr Santer and others have reluctantly contemplated in private.

The chief obstacles to the single currency concern national economic policies in the EU, inter-governmental relations and public opinion. To start the project on time, most EU governments are trying to cut public expenditure and implement other austerity measures to meet the strict Maastricht criteria on low budget deficits, public debts and inflation.

No doubt many governments are running such large deficits, and are accumulating such formidable high debts in their extensive social security systems, that they would be compelled to introduce belt-tightening programmes whether or not the deadline of January 1999 was approaching. As the

German government never tires of saying, healthy public finances are an objective always worth pursuing.

The fact remains, however, that it is fear of failing to meet the Maastricht targets which has galvanised governments into adopting deflationary policies at a time when millions of Europeans do not feel their countries have properly recovered from the most recent and very severe recession. Public opinion surveys repeatedly show that Europeans are pre-occupied with job insecurity and what seems to be a generally precarious economic future. But their governments are pursuing policies that merely intensify these concerns.

The result in France, and to some extent in Belgium, has been the eruption of sudden and widespread social protest. In Austria, the coalition government of social democrats and conservatives was forced to resign last October when it tried to introduce budget cuts. Mr Dini's government of non-party technocrats is finding it no easier to reform the public finances.

There are grave doubts, therefore, about the price that the EU may be forcing itself to pay, in terms of political stability and social harmony, if it goes ahead with monetary union in 1999. A related point is that, since a majority of EU governments will probably fail to qualify for the single currency, Emu could prove a factor dividing the member-states among themselves.

An EU in which Germany and France formed a monetary union, but Britain, Italy and Spain stayed outside, could lead to bitter accusations that one group was putting the other at a disadvantage because of its economic policies. Emu insiders would be watching like hawks for signs that outsiders were letting their currencies slip in search of a competitive edge, while outsiders might complain that they were being forced to pay an interest-rate premium for being kept out of monetary union.

If the EU decides, next year or in 1997, that the 1999 deadline is unrealistic, financial markets will almost certainly take

it as a signal that the French franc and some other currencies are overvalued. They will mark them down and pour money into the German mark.

According to many continental advocates of Emu, this could prove fatal to Europe.

Three are grave doubts about the price the EU may be forcing itself to pay, in term of political stability

Postponement of monetary union, they say, would irreversibly damage the EU's single market, launched in 1993, and set back the cause of closer political integration.

It would also delay the admission of former Communist countries in central and

eastern Europe. Europe would be in danger of losing its historic chance, created by the 1989 revolutions, to unite itself in peace and freedom.

But perhaps events need not take such an apocalyptic course. Failure to achieve monetary union in 1999 would represent a setback, but not eternal disaster. EU countries would still have the same incentives as now to pursue exchange-rate convergence and financial discipline at home.

The EU need not dismantle the European Monetary Institute, forerunner of the future European central bank, or tear up any of the detailed plans now being prepared for introducing a single currency. It would simply acknowledge that the Maastricht schedule was too tight for today's circumstances and it is better for Emu to start later.

For sure, postponing the single currency carries risks. But monetary union is a big idea, the biggest in EU history, and Tory Eurosceptics should understand that it is not going to disappear in a hurry.

Wilkes's

Rupert Allason, aka the spy writer Nigel West, is likely to be a lone voice raised during the forthcoming Second Reading of the M15 Bill. The Home Secretary is trying to give M15 a wider role in combating crime, shoulder to shoulder with the police. Wilkes's old Cambridge friends in M16 – the classic James Bond organisation – are aghast at the way M15 is expanding its empire, even to the point of openly advertising for recruits, while M16 has been forced to cut its agents overseas.

So M15 is no longer able to afford the cost of living in Russia, and lavish beach apartments in the Caribbean are no longer allowed on M16 expenses. But that is not Rupert's main objection. Nor is it even that he will have less material for his books; after all, the potential "nut wars" between M15 and the police will provide pure gold for novels.

No, the spy writer is primarily warning of chaos around the fear-mongering claims of an undercover branch of the police is wholly unsatisfactory because M15 officers – who need to protect their anonymity – will not be able to give evidence in open court. Allason reckons M15 is not really up to taking evidence and statements and all the huddle some paperwork that policemen on the beat have to deal with on a routine basis. Why should the MP bother about this? In his spare time, he has also acted as a special constable, m'lad. I rest my case.

The Home Secretary is robustly supporting the Government's line on the safety of beef, in spite of the scare stories. Wilkes spied Michael Howard tucking into a hearty serving of calf's liver at the Soho House in Greek Street. The traditional preference in the Commons for beef may explain the past behaviour of some of Wilkes's backbench colleagues. Nevertheless, Wilkes would like to see more ministers following Howard's example.

Stephen Dorrell, the wimpish Health Secretary, should set the standard by ordering beef sandwiches for the whole Cabinet at next Thursday's meeting. With a liberal helping of beef dripping.

At least the Department of Health's employees are doing their bit to combat BSE scaremongering. The departmental canteen menu has been boosting minced beef and onion pie

Minister] and EDCP [the Cabinet committee that he chairs on the Government's self-promotion] to ensure interdepartmental co-ordination and presentational cohesion, and to identify a lead Department responsible for ensuring that duty ministers are available to take media bids on the day.

"If ministers are content to proceed on this basis it is their wish that officials roll the pitch with key players before close of play on D-Day minus one to ensure a level playing field."

The whole thing is a spoof sent out as a Christmas card by the Department of Health's press office. It was written by Romola Christopherson, the redoubtable chief press officer who was once under the wing of Bernard Ingham at Number 10, to poke fun at the PR consultants invading Whitehall at the invitation of the First Secretary. Wilkes trusts that Hezza will see the funny side.

Less than seasonal cheer has broken out around Westminster. After the incident at the Reform Club when the Prime Minister's biographer Bruce "the brute" Anderson was cut over the eye by a glass of wine hurled by a journalist's wife, there were uneasy scenes in Annie's Bar in the Commons, where a team of MPs behaved disgracefully after they were beaten by lobby journalists in the annual News Quiz. The MPs accused the journalists of cheating and refused to buy them a round of drinks. Annie's Bar rules oblige Wilkes to withhold the names of the MPs, but suffice to say that the quizmaster, Sir Harold Walker, a former Deputy Speaker of the Commons, made his excuses and left before the end of the game.

Labour MPs are all talking about one scene from *The Wilderness Years*, the excellent BBC documentary accounting for Labour's long years in opposition (which can be summed up as: Thatcher, Foot, Owen and General Galtieri).

The scene is not Denis Healey squeezing into his mini, or Tony Benn trouncing the leadership in a



Frank preferred pop to politics

conference vote, it is the footage of a young, permed Patricia Hewitt at the 1980 conference berating the Callaghan government for betraying the working classes (rallying cry: "We have a right to be angry..."). The firebrand is now a respectable management consultant at Arthur Andersen.

Not all the Shadow Cabinet were watching on Sunday evening. Frank Dobson confessed to Wilkes that he was glued to *The Beatles Anthology* on the other side.

Wilkes's left-wing pin-up, Dawn Primarolo, who took over from Tony Benn as MP for Bristol South, has been backsliding from the Bennite cause. As a frontbencher in Gordon Brown's Treasury team and a member of the left-wing Campaign Group, Red Dawn has walked a careful tightrope and did not take part in the vote by some Campaign Group members against the 1p tax cut at the end of the Budget debate. Now Wilkes hears she has allowed her membership of the Campaign Group to lapse.

More evidence, sadly, that Hezza's touch is slipping. The First Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister got the thumbs down at a meeting of businessmen organised by Pro-Share, which promotes wider share ownership. His Labour-bashing speech prompted an immediate invitation to Alistair Darling, Labour's spokesman, to come and be their guest speaker next year.

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What if EMU can't fly?

This week has been a bad week for European monetary union (EMU). Events in France have placed a large question mark over the ability of its government to achieve the Maastricht criteria by 1999. The Major-Dini talks suggested that 1999 was premature. Already there is much soul-searching in Germany. And two weeks ago Commissioner Neil Kinnock argued that 1999 was unlikely and unwise. The Kohl-Chirac meeting yesterday may have reiterated their determination to see the project through by the appointed date, but there is now more reason than ever before to doubt whether such a monetary union will happen before the end of the century.

What would this mean? The European Commission believes it would be a disaster, and many on the Continent share that view. They argue that a failure to move ahead with monetary union in 1999 would deal a body-blow to the whole European project. Their view of the process of European integration is akin to riding a bicycle: once you stop pedalling, you automatically fall off. There is nothing for it but to press on. Is this view correct? If it is not, then a number of our partners are in danger of risking internal stability and medium-term prosperity for the sake of a chimera. To proceed towards a single currency according to a foolhardy or ultimately unattainable deadline could be an act of irresponsibility. Those countries unable easily to meet the terms of entry might take (as some believe is now happening in France) draconian action too quickly. The result might well be a wave of res-

entment towards both national and European political classes which would endanger the very European project that monetary union is designed to bolster and reinforce.

The truth, as felt by many pro-Europeans on this side of the Channel, is that the bicycle view is wrong. It underestimates the strength and durability of a union that is now nearly 40 years old. It also rests on the proposition that the next stage of integration can only consist of monetary union. This is surely wrong. The widening of the EU to include some of the nations of eastern Europe is, in itself, an act of great historical importance. This enlargement will require an extension of qualified majority voting, an enhanced role for the European Parliament and (long overdue) reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Also on the European agenda for 1996 is the pressure for more co-ordinated foreign and (apologies to Michael Fortillo) defence policies. We cannot rely on America always to be there to bail us out, as in Bosnia.

Events in Paris this week remind us how impatient some of our partners are for further union. Perhaps they cannot be persuaded that a slippage in the timetable for EMU would be no great tragedy. But we would find it easier to sell this approach to them if our diplomacy were more concerned with exploring the other possibilities in Europe, and less obsessed with fighting off encroachments from Johnny Foreigner. We can, if necessary, live without EMU for a few more years, because there are lots of other important things to do.

Seeking the secrets of the universe

It has taken 20 years of work, \$1.6bn and 2.3 billion miles. Yesterday, the Galileo spacecraft entered the final phases of its mission as it plunged into Jupiter's orbit. Was it really worth all the fuss and the money?

Members of the US Congress are asking this question with an eye on the vast budget deficit and the politically sensitive squeeze on the nation's welfare spending. After all, why pay billions gazing into outer space when back on planet Earth there are children who need feeding and old ladies who require medical treatment? It sounds cheap to juxtapose the images, but these are the real choices faced by America's cash-strapped politicians.

It is easy to argue for funding scientific projects that generate commercial returns. The satellites that circle the earth have all kinds of pay-offs. Weather forecasting and monitoring the ozone level and global warming are all far easier thanks to those machines in the sky. The sugar beet industry even claims to save a fortune by using satellite pictures to check when the crop is ripe. And, of course, Rupert Murdoch uses them to send us round-the-clock coverage of some of the world's major sporting events.

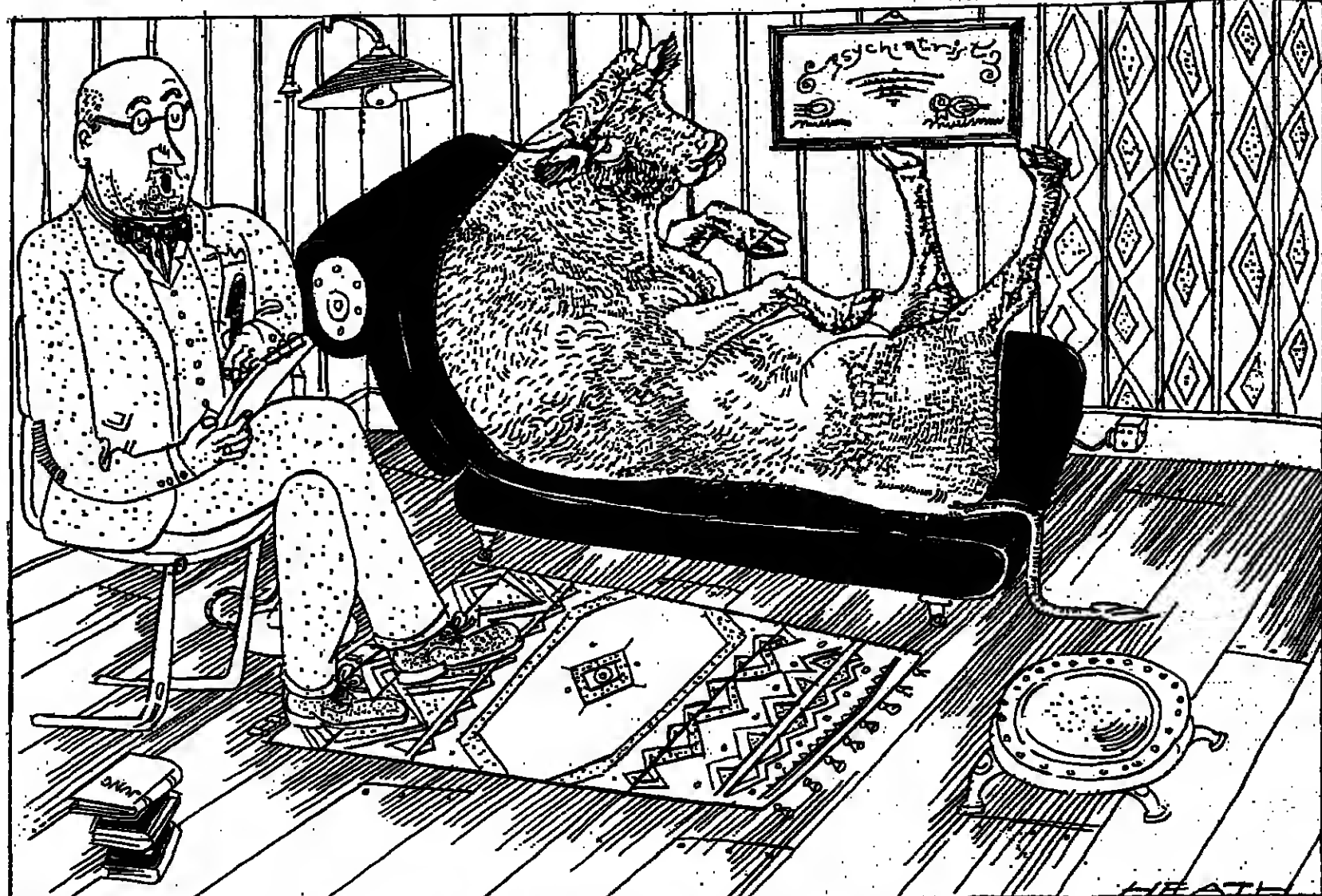
Satellites, sugar and soccer aren't much help in justifying Jupiter expeditions. The often quoted proposition that investing in space travel gave us non-stick frying pans as a spin-off is factually incorrect. But it is also crazy economics. The billions of dollars spent on space

travel could have been invested far more lucratively elsewhere. American scientists have even suggested that the cost of pouring all that brain power into space was to miss out on the emerging electronic technologies—and to cede the consumer electronics industry to Japan.

Of course, new improved consumer products aren't the only reason for investing in research. The scientific—if not economic—case for Galileo is overwhelming. We have the chance to discover the truth about that great swirling red spot on the planet's surface. And, if we are lucky, we may find some of the secrets of the universe lurking beneath Jupiter's clouds.

Where mysteries of the cosmos are at stake, scientists can draw on a wealth of public enthusiasm and support. After all, just think of all the films that have been made about space exploration. The success of *Star Trek* across the generations depended on "boldly going where no man has gone before". And the shelves of book shops are lined with accounts of the Big Bang and black holes. We are fascinated by the romance of the pursuit of pure knowledge and the beauty and secrets of the stars.

Not every space project will be worth the effort that goes into it. And the exact budget of the American space agency, NASA, is a legitimate subject for regular critical debate. But the never-ending quest to discover new worlds and expand our understanding is a vital and worthwhile part of what makes us human. Space exploration must boldly go on.



No, you're not mad, but you are a little depressed?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Some facts about the tribunal that condemned Saro-Wiwa

From Mr Michael Birnbaum, QC
Sir: The Independent of 6 December published a lengthy advertisement by the Nigerian High Commission justifying the conviction by a Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. It made the remarkable claim that the tribunal was lawful and "recognised under the Nigerian Judicial system".

Under the Nigerian constitution, a defendant is entitled to a fair hearing before an independent and impartial court or tribunal. In a case of murder, the trial must take place in a State High Court. Before or during the trial, the accused can seek judicial review of the decisions of the trial judge. After conviction, he can appeal. In a capital case, that appeal lies as of right first to the Court of Appeal and thence to the Supreme Court.

However, in recent years, successive military governments have used a system of decrees and special tribunals to undermine these constitutional rights. In the Saro-Wiwa case, the government invoked Decree 2 of

1987. President Abacha personally nominated the members of the tribunal. Two were judges, the third, as required by the decree, was a military officer.

Section 8 of the decree provides that the validity of any decision of the tribunal may not be questioned in any court of law. Hence, no right to judicial review or to appeal. Hence, the inevitable failure of all attempts by the defence to challenge in the ordinary courts the legality of the tribunal and its decisions. Hence, the execution of the defendants within only 10 days of the convictions.

Curiously, the High Commission has experienced a recurrent difficulty in accurately describing to the public the nature of the tribunal. For example, in January it circulated a brief entitled "Trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa in the Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal", claiming that the tribunal was "made up of two serving High Court Judges". As in the advertisement the existence of a third, military, member was omitted.

It is important to publicise the true facts, not only in the interests

of accuracy but of justice: reliable reports suggest that in January the same tribunal will embark on the trial for capital murder of 19 other Ogoni defendants.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL BIRNBAUM
Temple
London, EC4
6 December
The writer was an observer at the trials of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others on behalf of the Bar Human Rights Committee and the Law Society.

From Mr Ama Biney
Sir: The attempt by the Nigeria High Commission to set the record straight for the Federal Government of Nigeria, in a half-page advertisement in your newspaper, is a despicable travesty of democracy. Nigeria, headed by Sani Abacha, has not only gravely wronged her own people but the rest of Africa. The ruling cabal is now seeking to rationalise its dastardly acts in the light of international uproar over the executions of the nine Ogoni activists.

General Abacha and his siblings in the London Nigeria High

Commission see no contradiction in the fact that they have the freedom to advertise in a British newspaper, yet prohibit Ogonis the right to mourn the deaths of their nine activists. They see no contradiction in the fact that they have outlawed the right of Nigerians to air contrary political views in Nigerian newspapers, yet they are allowed to air their distortions externally.

The present political crisis in Nigeria reveals that the problems of Africa have transcended the traditional concept of the sovereign nation-state. The political and economic problems faced by Nigeria are not unique to that country, though General Abacha continues to proclaim undue interference in the internal affairs of Nigeria. The problems abound all over the continent and that is why Nigeria cannot be left alone.

What concerns Nigeria concerns all Africans genuinely concerned with democracy.

Yours faithfully,
AMA BINEY
Africa World Review
London, SE1
6 December

Dirty war fought on British soil

From Mr H. M. Mahdy
Sir: I would like to applaud Robert Fisk for his thorough reporting and analysis of the situation in Egypt (reports, 6 December). What troubles me, as a British citizen, is not only the barbarity of President Mubarak's regime, but that the Egyptian government is allowed to send its agents to practise their torture and shoot-to-kill tactics on British soil. The justification given is that Mr Mubarak's enemies are Islamic fundamentalists who are planning terrorist attacks.

One only needs to read Mr Fisk's coverage of the recent parliamentary elections in Egypt to know why the Egyptian environment is breeding terrorists

(reports, 28 and 29 November). The members of Muslim Brotherhood (a moderate Islamic group that condemns violence) who stood for parliamentary elections were sent to jail and hard labour by a military court for the hilarious reason of "holding anti-government meetings". Well, Mr Blair, Mr Ashdown et al should be extremely lucky that Mr Mubarak does not govern Britain.

Maybe there is not much that we can do for human rights in Egypt. But at least we should let President Mubarak know what we think of his government. We should withdraw any support, moral or material, to his regime. And, definitely, we must not allow his policemen/judges/executors to carry out their dirty war on British soil.

Yours faithfully,
H. M. MAHDY
Glasgow

Moving furniture won't stop theft

From Dr Gary Slapper
Sir: Although crime figures have spiralled upwards over the last decade, government policy relating to the prosecution authorities is now set to describe a full circle ("Big boost for police in CPS shake-up", 5 December).

In 1985, prosecuting offenders was a task taken from the police and given to a new independent authority, the Crown Prosecution Service. The rationale then was that the police were not the best suited to be prosecutors, as they would often have a commitment to winning a case where the evidence was weak. They were also not best placed to evaluate public policy considerations.

Now the Attorney-General is

about to install Crown prosecutors in police stations so as to "improve the liaison between officers and prosecuting authorities". The obviously intended result is that staff of the CPS (known to many police officers as the "Criminals' Protection Service") will be immersed in police culture and thinking.

It is the fault neither of the police nor of the Crown Prosecution Service that crime is an epidemic problem in the 1990s, so rearranging this institutional furniture will have no appreciable impact on crime figures. Major political and economic changes are to blame for modern crime, two-thirds of which is domestic burglary and theft of and from cars.

Yours faithfully,
GARY SLAPPER
The Law School
Staffordshire University
Stoke-on-Trent

Playwrights' capital work

From Mr Jonathan Meth
Sir: David Lister asks ("Lottery cash may fund new plays", 5 December) why shouldn't playwrights be left to the dictates of the marketplace? The system of state arts investment (I refuse to call it subsidy) in this country operates to provide resources to buildings and companies as the providers of the arts to the nation.

Practitioners, technicians and administrators employed by these buildings and companies are paid a salary, albeit not a very high one. Without a playwright, there can be no new work in theatre. Playwrights, however, are not part of the structural economic fabric of these organisations. They are brought in as hired hands, as and when others decide.

Good plays take time to evolve. They require development. They can and should take between six and 12 months to write. With very few exceptions at the uppermost echelon, playwrights are paid between £3,000 and £5,000 for a play.

It is widely acknowledged that Britain is fortunate enough to lead the world in this field. But on a freelance basis, without more opportunities to earn money, playwrights will inevitably move towards other media to make a living. This is the law of the marketplace, and it is why National Lottery funds to resource playwrights in the creation of capital assets, far from being elitist, is imperative if theatre is to thrive.

As the tabloids have clearly demonstrated, the lottery promotes the myth that arts are an additional luxury, instead of vital to the health and wealth of our nation. Where does the real elitism lie—with playwrights earning a living wage for their work, or a windfall that allows the Government to continue to marginalise the arts via Budget cutbacks?

Yours faithfully,
JONATHAN METH
New Playwrights Trust
London, NW5

Solitary words that live on baleful tenterhooks, alack

Q: You are here to tell us about the work of the Single Word Protection Society?
A: That's right.
Q: Would you like to tell us something about the work of the Single Word Protection Society?
A: Certainly. Our aim is to stand up for those words in the English language that have been relegated to a single-use function and to plead for their reintegration into society.
Q: I see. Could you give us an example?
A: Of course. Take the word "duccet".
Q: But surely "duccet" is quite a normal word? It's commonly used, is it not?
A: Is it? Can you give me an example of its being used?
Q: Well, people sometimes do say, in a sort of mock-heroic way, "It's a long time since I heard your dulcet tones...".
A: And that's it.
Q: Pardon?
A: That's it. That is the only time "duccet" is used. In conjunction with "tones". No one uses the word "dul-

cet" without "tones". No one says, "I heard your dulcet voice" or "Now hear the dulcet singing of the BBC Chorus". It's a single-use word. But why not extend it? After all, "duccet" is just another word for sweet and gentle, isn't it? You could easily look at someone in a dulcet manner or lay your head on someone's dulcet lap. Q: And you want us to use "duccet" more often?
A: Not just "duccet". There are hundreds of words that are condemned to a solitary existence, words which could do a perfectly good job if given the chance.
Q: Could you give us another example?
A: I'll give you a couple. Unwed. Unusing.
Q: Let me think, now. Unwed mothers? Unusing heroes?
A: Very good. Mothers are the only people who are unwed. Never fathers. Never spinsters. Nor is anyone save a hero unusing. There are no unusing martyrs and no unusing villains.
Q: I suppose you are right.
A: There are no unusing mothers, and no unwed heroes.
Q: Aren't there?

Q: Well, there are, but they are never called such. We are too lazy to do it. Our way with language is so predictable that all these single words are caught in a cliché trap. We are condemning these words to a dull, repetitive existence. In many cases we are in danger of forgetting what the word really means.
Q: Which word?
A: Bated.
Q: Bated?
A: Bated breath. With bated breath. What does it mean?
Q: Um, I suppose it means on tenterhooks.
A: What are or were tenterhooks?
Q: Aye, there's the nub.
A: Any idea what a nub really was?
Q: Oh, get on with it and stop showing off.

A: Bated breath is just a shorter version of "abated breath". So we aren't too worried about that one—the word "abate" can look after itself. But there are many words that we are worried about: sackcloth, grist, parlance, shrift, rakish, fell...
Q: Stop! Explain.
A: Sackcloth can only be used with "ashes", though "ashes" can be used without "sackcloth". This is extremely discriminatory against sackcloth. And grist can only be for the mill. Parlance can only be common. Shrift can only be short. The only thing that can be rakish is an angle. There is only one thing that can be fell...
Q: I presume you mean designs?
A: Oh, I wasn't actually thinking of designs. Can designs be fell?
Q: I think so. "He had fell designs on her honour...".
A: You're right. I was thinking of "at one fell swoop". The word is not so threatened as I believed. It has two usages.
Q: Carry on.
A: We are also quite worried about "baleful", as you can only give people baleful looks and nothing else baleful.

Q: As a matter of interest, what is "bale"?
A: Terror.
Q: Thank you.
A: We are worried, too, about "alack", which can only be used with "alas" as in "alas and alack", although "alas" can go out by itself. We are worried about "invidious", as only comparisons can be invidious, although invidious is a perfectly good word meaning "arousing resentment". We are worried about brackish...
Q: What worries you about "brackish"? That's only used to describe water?
A: That, and also the fact that its meaning of slightly salty is being forgotten.
Q: And if we send lots of money to the Single Word Protection Society, it will definitely help to boost your work?
A: Yes.
Q: And do you in fact think you will get lots of money?
A: Some hope.
Q: What kind of hope?
A: Fortorn.
Q: I agree, alack.
A: Thank you.

Church disclosure

From The Rev Roy Arnold
Sir: As the person responsible for the release of the Nine O'clock Service story to the press—tabloid and respectable—I have to say that I found Bryan Appleyard's article ("A church in psychedelic chaos", 28 November) ill-informed and unfair. He implies that the tabloid press was responsible for the story coming to light. This is simply not true. The Church of England uncovered the story when people in the NOS community began to talk to each other and to others in the Church of England hierarchy. Once it was established that a systematic abuse had been going on, the Diocese of Sheffield took rapid steps to look after the victims, to establish precisely what had gone on and to make a full and comprehensive statement to the media.

Mr Appleyard's contention that "but for the prurient nosiness of our tabloid press" the story would have gone undiscovered, amounts to a clear imputation that the first disclosure did not come from the church when, in fact, it did. Yours faithfully,
ROY ARNOLD
Sheffield
28 November

Required reading

From Mr R. K. Wohlleb
Sir: One gets used to anti-German digs in the British press. A case in point is the report about the sale of the manuscript of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* ("Epic manuscript sold for £276,000", 2 December). You claim that Remarque remained *persona non grata* in Germany for 50 years after his book was publicly burned by the Nazis in 1933. Not so. Remarque died in 1970, and his novel was required reading at my school in Germany during the early Fifties (the film version was shown at school as well). Also, why do you not let your readers know who was the buyer? It was, in fact, purchased jointly by the state government of Lower Saxony and the Savings Bank of Osnabrück. Remarque's home town, to go on exhibition there in the local museum. Yours faithfully,
R. K. WOHLLEB
Teddington, Middlesex
3 December

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number. (Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

صلى الله عليه وسلم

Imagine – the elder brother I never knew

Where were you when John Lennon was killed 15 years ago today? The playwright Alan Bleasdale remembers where he was, how he felt and why it still hurts to think about the hero he never met

I am possibly the only person in Liverpool of a similar age to John Lennon, but he lived, who claims never to have met him. Or, indeed, any of the Beatles.

Believe me, everyone else had met one of the Beatles by 1963. The whole of the sixth form of my grammar school seemed to spend their weekends at parties popping pills in the presence of John, Paul, George or Ringo.

Especially George, for boy George, to his eternal chagrin, was and always will be the youngest of the Beatles. He was therefore more likely to be the social victim of a sad 17-year-old pupil who was only there popping pills, in the unlikely event that he was actually there at all, so that the pupil could stand taller and louder during school assembly on the following Monday morning.

This fame by association reached its zenith when a member of our chess club announced that his albatross had impregnated Ringo Starr's mother's bitch. In the silence of castles and knights, someone else said that his mother was a close personal friend of Ringo's mother, and he knew for a fact that Ringo's mother did not have a dog of any description, and a fist-fight broke out.

Mind you, few ever spoke of John. For John was the leader of the pack. John was older, and John was dangerous and wore black leather. He did not suffer fools and schoolboys at all. Furthermore, he had the cruel power of sarcasm and that frowning "Who the fuck are you?" look upon his face.

No one knew then that he was hopelessly short-sighted and insecure and sentimental beneath the butch bravado and broken-nosed swagger. In 1963 he never talked about his dreadful childhood.

Naturally, John was our total, complete and utter hero. Paul was far too pretty and always got the girls. Ringo brought out the worst snobbery that a grammar school education could formulate, and George, well, you know, George was always so young...

An only child, I seemed to have spent most of my adolescence and some of my attempts at manhood in search of the older brother I never had. Lennon was an obvious focus

of that desire, although with hindsight I suspect that it would not have been much fun being John Lennon's younger brother. If he could have seen me to find me, he probably would have hit me just for being there. And then felt deeply sorry. So the legend goes.

However, throughout the following two decades, that is how I very quietly considered John Lennon. I did not actually expect him to turn up at Christmas or at

we heard the worst news of all about someone "famous" we had known or admired, loved or even hated.

When I first heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated I was at the Cavern Club ("Home of the Beatles") in Liverpool. Eric Morecambe? Outside our house, in reverse gear, parking the car, listening to the news on Radio 1 and wistfully wishing to reverse for ever and ever. Elvis Presley? I opened our front door one morning and my big teddy-boy cousin fell into my arms in a mess of tears.

Albert Goldman, the deeply vile and grotesque biographer of both Presley and Lennon? I laughed out loud and went to the off-licence. John Lennon? Oh well. Oh dear. For the first and only time that I can recall, I woke up at three in the morning and went up to the attic to stare at my typewriter. I am accustomed to working at that time – as I write this it is 4.55am – but usually I would not have been to bed in between the thought and the process.

Relax. There was no premonition. Relax. I was not the walrus in my dreams, and "In My Life" was not on the stereo. Lennon did not visit me upon a flaming pie. I was merely deeply worried about Act One, Scene Three.

So I soldiered on, armed only with tannin and nicotine, vaguely aware that my wife eventually woke and began to prepare our children for school. Just before eight o'clock I heard a wild, shocked and shocking scream from two floors beneath me. Convinced of a domestic accident, I hurried down the stairs to be met on the landing by my wife as she blurted out the already brokenhearted news that John Lennon had been shot to death in New York City.

I cried like I did not know that I could cry. I learnt later, when my mother died and our eldest boy was ill, that I could cry some more, but those are other stories. For, until then, death had stayed away from my vicinity since my grandmother died when I was seven. Maybe I had been saving it all up, to use it so ludicrously on this man whom I had, of course, not met, who was no doubt seriously flawed and certainly fatal.

I would, naturally, refuse to admit this at dinner parties, in public or in



I cried like I did not know that I could cry... until then, death had stayed away from my vicinity

christenings and family gatherings, but he was the one I thought about, worried about, read about, was both bewildered and delighted by, and the only one whose records I still bought.

I lived in hope that despite the disappearances, the drugs and the drink and occasionally attempting to wear a tampon on his head in an American night-club, my secret older brother might one day grow up. I never thought that he would never grow old.

It would be gauche to admit this at dinner parties, perhaps, but I guess all of us know exactly where we were and what we were doing when



print, but I ended up later that long day and night spitting in crazed, impotent rage upon the first published picture of Lennon's murderer, Mark Chapman, in the local evening newspaper.

I will gladly leave it to others more cold and qualified than I am to explain why Lennon meant so much to so many total strangers. I do know that it is terribly easy to be sardonic and sneer at that muddled man – and at people like me who loved him from a distance. Yet still I do not really understand why it is that right now, all of 15 years later, at dawn's feeble attempt to turn to daylight, I still find myself wearing my handkerchief on my sleeve.

You may recall that on the Sunday following Lennon's death, thousands upon thousands of people congregated on the steps of the St George's Hall in Liverpool to pay tribute and homage. I was asked to go, but I was suspicious of some of the motives and also I did not want to flaunt my mourning as nakedly as I now seem to be doing.

However, a good friend of mine and his wife were there for the final massed chorus of "Imagine", which accidentally coincided with the Sunday licensing hours. They joined the people who flooded into the nearest public house, a sawdust place that was not best prepared to be a barstool in history.

In the far corner sat an elderly man much accustomed to solitary drinking. He may or may not have been nursing that night's first pint of Guinness and a packet of Woodbines, but he was certainly bewildered by the succession of people who wailed into the bar sobbing and mumbling the mantra: "John is Dead".

Finally, this man in the far corner of the pub turned to my friend's wife and asked her what this was for a time and then turned to her and said "All this because of John Lennon? Fucking hell, girl, can you imagine the scenes when Ken Dodd goes?"

Lennon would have loved that. I would have loved it a lot more if it had not been about John Lennon – that older brother I never had. I still cannot quite believe he is not still here, getting it all right and getting it all wrong.

Engr. Inu, do you take me for a fool?

The letter is postmarked Lagos; it is addressed to me as Greer Germaine, care of my agent. Nothing unusual in that. The address can be found in any reasonably good reference library, even in Lagos, I imagine. No need to get nervous or imagine that somebody has sold my details to a blackbirding or white-slaving ring.

I should not divulge the contents of a letter sent to me in confidence. I know, but confidence is the name of this Nigerian's game, confidence trickery, and I reckon it is time you were told.

The letter purports to come from "Engr. Inu, Mustapha". Engr. does not, in this case, stand for "engraved by" but for "Engineer" – I think Engr. Inu writes, or rather prints out, as follows:

"Sir," – not the best beginning, you will agree – then under, in capitals, "request for urgent business partnership". "First, I must solicit your strictest confidence in this transaction. This is by virtue of its nature as being utterly confidential and 'top secret'." (Alas, Engr. Inu, a little more research might have revealed that you were about to send your secret massive to a journalist who is also that least of vessels, a woman.) "You have been recommended by an associate who assured me in confidence of your ability and reliability to prosecute a transaction of great magnitude involving a pending business transaction requiring maximum confidence." In fewer words, "Someone tells me you are devious, greedy and stupid, with delusions of grandeur."

It is only proper at this point that I confess to a slight anti-Nigerian bias, not because a Niger-

ian dictator has recently offered a number of dissidents, which included a writer – such misfortunes can befall the nicest of countries – but because I once came upon a large Nigerian youth bawling his eyes out by Lancaster Gate Tube station. He told me he had missed the bus bid on by his college to take him back to Darlington and had no money to get home and no idea how to get there.

Amid tearful protestations of eternal gratitude he had showed me an identity card and assured me that I should write to his parents, who were high-ranking officials in Nigeria, and they would not only refund any money I should give him but reward me handsomely for my noble behaviour.

I, imagining him to be a human being more or less like myself, assured him that this would not be necessary. As I was on my way to Covent Garden, I was easy to take him in my text and drop him at King's Cross with £20 for the expenses of his journey. I wrote my name and address on a card so that he could return the money, which of course he never did. Now I come to think of it, he probably wasn't at college anywhere, least of all in Darlington, and the people whose names he was bandying about probably didn't exist.

Engr. Inu's ingratiations continue: "We are top officials of the Federal Contract Review Panel who are interested in importation of goods into our country with funds that are presently



GERMAINE GREER

trapped in Nigeria. In order to commence this business we solicit your assistance to enable us to transfer into your account the said trapped funds. The source of this fund is as follows: during the last Interim Regime here in Nigeria, the Government Officials set up companies and awarded themselves contracts which were grossly over-invoiced in various ministries. The present Military Government set up a Contract Review Panel and we have identified a lot of inflated contract funds which are presently floating in the Central Bank of Nigeria ready for payment. However, by virtue of our position as civil servants and members of this panel, we cannot acquire this money in our names. I have therefore, been delegated as a matter of trust by my colleagues of the panel to look for an overseas partner into whose account we would transfer the sum of US\$21,320,000.00 (Twenty One Million, Three Hundred and Twenty Thousand US Dollars). Hence we are writing you this letter.

"We have agreed to share the money thus: 20 per cent for the account owner (you) 70 per cent for us (the officials) 10 per cent to be used in settling taxation and all local and foreign expenses. It is from the 70 per cent that we wish to commence the importation business. Please, note that this transaction is 100 per cent safe and

we hope to commence the transfer latest 7 (seven) banking days from the date of the receipt of the following information by Fax: 234-1-4974907; Tel/Fax: 234-90-407309 your Banker's name, company's name, address, Account number and fax number.

I, who bank at a 17th-century institution where clients are escorted into the banking hall by an imposing gentleman dressed as if Beau Brummel had died but yesterday, did not know whether to laugh or cry at all of this. The notion of delivering up my cosseted account to be siphoned off by these blackguards was not so much preposterous as sacrilegious.

Nobody who does what I do and works as hard as I do is interested in getting rich quick; even my lottery ticket is bought, when I can remember to buy it at all, in the name of my college. I once had a dream about becoming a millionaire and spent the whole night trying to work out what to do with my million, which turned into a million yards of red silk and was used to mop up the blood of slaughtered elephants, to my (in the dream) entire satisfaction.

Poor Engr. Inu had no way of knowing how wide of the mark his net had been thrown. But I have heard that the people who masquerade behind such masks as Engr. Inu's have made money out of gullible Englishers, who really did expect barrowloads of hard currency to be shovelled into their accounts from a country that clearly has squandered its vast assets and its considerable credit in ways not wildly dissimilar.

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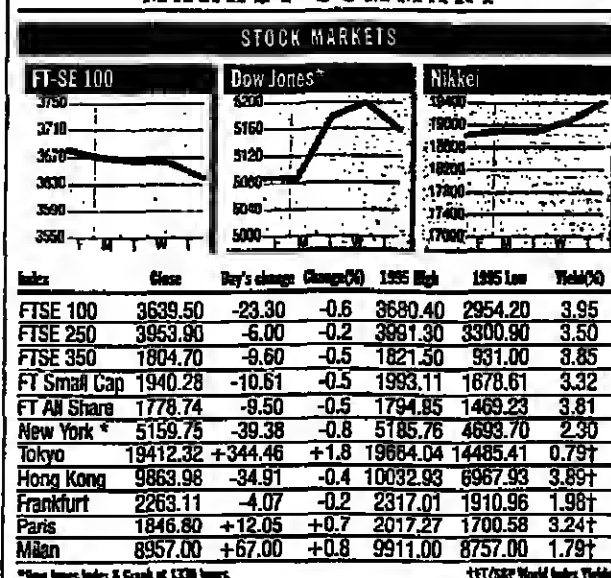
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by Tony Reeve and Steve Way

MARKET SUMMARY



MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Shares	Price (p)	Change (p)	% Change
T & N	130	10	8.3
Airtours	338	17	5.3
GEC	314	12.5	4.1
MI Labs	379	13	3.6
Trafalgar Hse	29.3	1	3.5

INTEREST RATES

Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond
0.55	7.8	7.8
0.50	7.6	7.6
0.45	7.4	7.4
0.40	7.2	7.2
0.35	7.0	7.0
0.30	6.8	6.8
0.25	6.6	6.6
0.20	6.4	6.4
0.15	6.2	6.2
0.10	6.0	6.0
0.05	5.8	5.8
0.00	5.6	5.6

BOND YIELDS

Index	1 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
UK	6.53	6.25	7.43	8.53	7.80	8.51	8.51
US	5.88	5.81	5.70	7.79	6.04	7.86	7.86
Japan	0.28	0.38	2.61	4.65	-	-	-
Germany	4.12	3.81	6.11	7.43	6.84	-	-

CURRENCIES

Index	1 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
US	1.5378	-0.25c	1.564	0.8503	0.11	0.639	0.639
DM	1.5385	-0.65c	1.5636	0.8508	0.27	0.639	0.639
£	1.5385	-0.61c	1.5636	0.8508	0.27	0.639	0.639
¥	155.602	-0.61c	157.122	101.185	30.255	100.465	100.465
₹	82.80	-0.10	80.5	93.8	unch	96.50	96.50

OTHER INDICATORS

Index	1 Month	1 Year	2 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
Oil Brent	17.83	+0.24	18.34	RPI	149.8+3.2pc	2.4	14 Dec
Gold	388.70	+0.3	376.1	GDP	106.6	2.1pc	4.3
S&P 500	252.78	+0.6	240.680	Base Rates	6.75pc	5.25	-

IN BRIEF

High street sales dampen rate cut hopes
Stronger high street activity than expected from the Confederation of British Industry's distributive trades survey helped to dampen hopes of an early cut in interest rates. The evidence of an upturn for retailers combined with Eddie George's remarks to the Treasury Select Committee - widely interpreted as hinting that he would oppose a cut in rates when he meets the Chancellor next Wednesday - to push gilts down by half a point. Retail sales volumes were up in November compared with a year ago, the CBI said. The balance of retailers who said sales were up rather than down jumped to 25 per cent compared with 16 per cent in October. The CBI said it represented the largest rise in sales since April.

Warning from Blue Circle
Blue Circle warned yesterday that its 1995 figures would be hit by a £65m provision to restructure its heating and bathroom businesses, together with the underperforming home products division. The impact of the exceptional charge should be mitigated, however, by a one-off £55m profit from the sale of the company's landfill operation. The creation of "centres of excellence" for its different boiler and radiator products in the UK, France and Germany follows a review announced in September and the departure of Charles Young, the division's £193,000-a-year chief executive.

Salomon cuts back in Asia
Salomon Brothers, the US investment bank, has cut 50 jobs in its Hong Kong office, and further positions throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Asian markets have performed badly in dollar terms this year, in contrast to strong earnings from the US market.

Brittan warns against EMU complacency
Sir Leon Brittan, vice-president of the European Commission, said there was a "dangerous state of complacency" in the City about European Monetary Union and the far-reaching effects it would have. Giving the inaugural Life City lecture, Sir Leon said: "EMU will be, whether you like it or not, a factor in your competitiveness equation and given the importance of the City to the UK economy as a whole, this is something that should weigh with us when we come to make the decision about whether and when to join."

Compass points upward
Compass, the contract catering company, boosted pre-tax profits by 31 per cent to £73.2m in the year to 1 October. Turnover climbed 64 per cent to £1.51bn, and the dividend was increased 13 per cent to 7.6p. Shares rose 3.5p to 450.5p.

Matra Marconi wins satellite order
Matra Marconi, the joint venture owned by GEC and Lagardere, has won a £100m order for satellites from the UK Ministry of Defence. The order adds to an existing £200m contract.

French crisis 'threatens single currency'
The chief economist of Deutsche Bank has admitted that the worsening French crisis could destroy the dream of a European single currency because of instability in France and deepening doubts in Germany.

Accountants rush for protection

ROGER TRAPP and JOHN WILLCOCK

About 10,000 accountants are poised to protect themselves from damaging legal actions that have the potential to bankrupt them. Price Waterhouse and Ernst & Young, which each have nearly 400 partners and about 4,000 other professional staff, are widely expected to announce next week that they have opted to follow the lead of American firms and set themselves up as limited liability partnerships.

This will mean legally registering their operations offshore. Under British law partners are only allowed to limit their liability if they take no part in running the business. Accelerating the changes was the High Court decision on Wednesday against Brierley Hamlyn, whose 150 partners face ruin from a £105m bill for negligence. The firm is appealing the decision, but the judgment has set the rest of the industry running for cover.

Setting up on the other side of the Atlantic is not considered practical since - in the words of one senior partner - a court is likely to consider an audit firm operating in the UK as subject to UK law. But there is intense speculation that the firms may be planning to register themselves in an offshore financial centre closer to Britain, such as Liechtenstein, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

The expected move follows KPMG's announcement earlier this year that it is incorporating its audit arm in an effort to give itself greater protection from spiralling negligence claims. It means that, with Coopers & Lybrand, the UK's largest firm, also considering some form of incorporation, most of the leading six firms are likely to have ceased to be conventional partnerships by this time next year.

As a worldwide organisation, Arthur Andersen is understood to be in a more complex position but considering its options, while Touche Ross has consistently stated its opposition to abandoning partnership status - although insiders suspect it may be looking at protecting itself.

Observers believe this could cover the whole audit business, the largest part of the firm. Alternatively, it could include the entire firm, embracing tax, consultancy and corporate finance work. Partners have been unwilling to turn their operations into limited companies because they would lose the tax and other advantages. The claims have become such a problem that the profession is pressing for reform of the law of joint and several liability, under which an accountant can bear the total loss resulting from a corporate collapse. Because this would take such a long time to achieve, the profession is also campaigning for a halfway house - changing section 510 of the Companies Act 1983, in order to limit auditors' liability.

Labour MPs break ranks on Murdoch

CHRIS BLACKHURST Westminster Correspondent

Labour MPs have broken ranks with the party hierarchy by coming out to condemn the Byzantine tax avoidance arrangements of Rupert Murdoch's News International.

When the Independent revealed last week that over the last decade News International made nearly £1bn in profits but paid just £11.74m in tax, Labour said nothing. The party that is usually quick to condemn City "fat cats" and corporate excess maintained a stony silence.

Even the fact that News International, which owns the Sun and Times newspapers, paid no tax on profits of £779m in its last financial year, was not enough to stir Labour. Alistair Darling, the party's City spokesman, brushed aside the party's apparent lack of interest, explaining that "you must never design a tax system to get at one person. It is a matter of fundamental principle".

Cynics pointed to the growing rapprochement between Mr Murdoch and a Labour leadership anxious to ensure that the media baron's titles do not exhibit the same hostility in the general election as they did in 1992. The Sun has always boasted that it was the paper "not won't" for the Tories.

The two sides' courtship has seen Mr Blair speak at an internal conference for senior executives of Mr Murdoch's empire in Australia, where the Labour leader was roundly praised by his host. When News International's Today newspaper closed, Mr Blair penned an article exhorting its readers to switch to its Sun stablemate.

However, following fresh disclosures in the Independent that deals in three of News International's obscure "finance" companies had produced profits of £340m in the year to June 1994 but attracted no tax, some Labour MPs have read enough.

Moore's reject Littlewoods bid

NIGEL COPE

The Moore's family re-exerted its grip on the Littlewoods empire yesterday when it voted against a £1.2bn offer for the company from its former chief executive, Barry Dale.

At an emergency meeting held on an icy day in Liverpool, the 32 family shareholders voted not to open the company's books to Mr Dale.

The family also overturned a resolution that would have encouraged other bidders to come forward.

Board members voted by an overwhelming majority to discourage any other offers and urged them to be withdrawn in order to end uncertainty. Littlewoods' chairman, Leonard van Geest, said after the meeting: "The outcome of the meeting shows that shareholders have strongly supported the board's advice to reject the Bidco [Barry Dale] approach."

T&N awaits \$185m ruling

MAGNUS GRIMOND

An asbestosis claim for £185m (£116m) against T&N, the UK automotive engineering group, was last night hanging on the judgment of a US jury.

The case is one of the biggest, dating back to the days when, as Turner & Newall, the company was the world's biggest supplier of asbestos. It involves material installed in 1959 in the 60-storey Chase Manhattan Plaza, the New York headquarters of the bank of the same name.

In what is likely to be taken as a precedent for other cases, the jury was sent out at midday on Wednesday and was still deliberating when the court reconvened early yesterday. But the shares bounced 10p to 130p on optimism that T&N may not have to pay the full amount after a much larger claim was settled at a fraction of the previous estimated liability.

A \$600m suit brought against 37 defendants, including T&N, has resulted in the UK group settling for £6.5m, against earlier estimates that it might have to pay up to \$50m. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had brought the case over asbestos installed in the three New York airports under its control and its headquarters in the World Trade Center.

Allied Irish Banks buys Govett arm

JOHN WILLCOCK Financial Correspondent

Allied Irish Banks has agreed to buy John Govett Group from Govett & Co for £101m, making the bank the largest Irish fund manager.

AIB takes 75 per cent of the equity and will eventually concentrate all its existing fund management in the new company - John Govett Holdings. The management team at John Govett gets a 20 per cent stake and Govett Oriental Investment Trust will take the remaining 5 per cent.

While John Govett is well known for its unit and investment trusts, as well as operations in the Far East, its parent has been troubled by a series of law suits in the US. Yesterday, Govett renamed itself London Pacific Group, and said it was retaining its London quote despite doing most of its business in New York.

Analysis thought the price AIB paid for John Govett was cheap on a historic price earnings ratio of 10.7. The price also represented 3.4 per cent of the £2bn in funds under management. This compares with 15.4 times and 4.2 per cent respectively for Commerzbank's acquisition this year of Jnpiter Tyndal.

Analysts warned, however, that John Govett's margins could be eroded, thus hitting earnings. AIB's shares slipped 1p to 365p while Govett's put on 22p to 242p.

Merger speculation lifts GUS



Almost £200m was added to the stock market value of Great Universal Stores yesterday as board changes at Britain's largest mail-order company triggered speculation that it was poised to merge with the retailing house Next, writes Nigel Cope.

Sparkling the excitement was the announcement that Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale, who is 68, will step down as chairman of GUS next summer and be succeeded by his cousin, Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale, who is currently chairman of Next.

GUS's deputy chairman, Richard Pugh, moved swiftly to dampen merger hopes. He said last night: "We have no present interest in any merger. I can't see a great advantage in it."

GUS shares closed 18p higher at 632p. Next rose 5p to 449p. Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale's appointment was welcomed in the City, which has become frustrated by the lack of openness and candour at GUS. One analyst said: "It is brilliant news. The mail order business needs to be modernised and it is good that they have got someone who has a history of turning things round."



Executive pool (left to right): Leonard van Geest, Littlewoods chairman, acting group managing director Bill Hartley, and finance director Jim Michie at yesterday's egn in which the £1.2bn bid from ex-chief executive Barry Dale was voted out

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INSTRUMENTS FOR PROFESSIONALS

Auditors seek an escape route from retribution



COMMENT

Audit fees are not as poor as most accountants would have you believe, but for many partners they no longer justify the risk of being held liable for somebody else's cock-ups.

The 1980s made the business of auditing, never particularly respected outside the narrow world of accountancy, into a positively disreputable one. Rightly or wrongly, auditors were held partly responsible for the state of fraudulent insolvencies that began to roll in from the mid-1980s onwards.

Why didn't the auditors spot the problems, how is it possible for a company to be given a clean audit only to go bust a few months later, and what do we pay these people for if not to give fair warning that all is not as it seems, was the general thrust of the criticism? The legacy is a string of legal actions for alleged negligence, some of them of gigantic proportions.

In the hunt for retribution and compensation, auditors are a soft and easy target. The 150 former and current partners of Brierley Hamlyn who face financial ruin following a £105m High Court judgment may have captured headlines, but the amount is a flea-bite compared with others waiting in the wings. The scramble among big firms towards the haven of limited liability reinforces the impression of highly-paid professionals attempting to wriggle out of their obligations. Always there when lucrative fees are in the offing, however disreputable the client, it is hard to see these people for dust once the balloon goes up. In some cases the audit firms are doubly open to criticism since by association they lend credibility and respectability to those who might otherwise be considered suspect.

While all this is fair enough comment, however, it is equally reasonable for the big firms to seek ways of limiting exposure to the "nuclear" claim. The partnership structure, in this country at least, positively attracts the big negligence law suit since the potential pot of damages is so large – not only the assets of the firm can be claimed, but those of any employee with partnership status, too. Audit fees are not as poor as most accountants would have you believe, but for many partners they no longer justify the risk of being held liable for somebody else's cock-ups.

Limiting the liability without surrendering the considerable tax benefits of partnership is a far from easy thing, however. In other countries, such as the US, partnerships can have their cake and eat it; they can keep the tax and other benefits of partnership and limit their liability at the same time. One solution, therefore, is to go offshore. As KPMG appears to have acknowledged in rejecting it, the problem with this approach is that it looks suspicious.

Though some territories such as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man have long had their arrangements accepted by the British courts, it is difficult to escape the view that taking this step looks like running away. Even those now understood to be considering such an approach are keen to point out that they want none of the tax advantages associated with such havens for fear that would diminish their standing. Furthermore, it is by no means clear the British

courts would in practice accept such a cosmetic limit on liability.

Reform of the law of joint and several liability to allow limited partnership is the obvious long-term solution, but whether sympathy for the plight of accountants and lawyers is sufficient to create the parliamentary time for it seems open to question. In the meantime, accountants need to do far more to rehabilitate the whole process of audit. Public expectations of what auditors do and what can be expected of them may be unrealistically high, but by the same count, past failures are so dramatic that the scope for improvement must still be considerable. If accountants are to get the privilege of limited liability, they should also be willing to take on board the extra burden of ensuring that companies have adequate internal controls – a Cadbury recommendation which most auditors are resisting fiercely.

For Lord Wolfson read Lord Wolfson

On the face of it, the management succession announced yesterday by Great Universal Stores was just what you would expect from a family business. One Lord Wolfson, 68, steps down as chairman. Another Lord Wolfson (his 59-year-old cousin) steps up to take over the family firm. Surely this is a classic example of a fuddy-duddy, nepo-

tistic business dynasty ignoring the needs and wishes of external shareholders and looking after its own? Not quite.

While it is true that the board did not exactly scour the globe for an external candidate and says it voted unanimously for Wolfson, there are a number of things that make this case different. First GUS has done well to keep the business in the family this long. Many business dynasties founder when they reach the third generation as they run out of plausible candidates to run the company. Younger members have different agendas, or want to cash in their stake. One need look no further than the strife-ridden Littlewoods for an example of what can go wrong.

Asprey's, the jeweller, has also fallen out of family control after 200 years. Pilkington is no longer run by a Pilkington. Sainsbury's is a rare example of a large public company that has flourished under family ownership, though it, too, has had problems recently. The remarkable thing about GUS, founded in the early part of the century, is that it has lumbered on quite nicely and in its latest Lord Wolfson has found a third generation who is, if anything, more highly regarded than his predecessors.

Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale to give him his full title, is clearly not the family duffer. He spent 18 years at GUS and became chairman of its key mail-order business before leaving in 1978. He was later chief of staff at the political office of 10 Downing Street

for six years. More recently he has overseen the recovery of Next, the once stricken high street retailer where he is chairman.

He is also a more open, City-friendly type. You never know, shareholders might actually find out what is going on in this notoriously uncommunicative company once he gets into the chair. His appointment could also mark a change of direction for GUS.

Under Sir Isaac who bought a controlling stake in the company in the 1930s, GUS was an aggressive takeover operator. Under the current chairman it has been a more cautious animal, edging up profits each year and squirreling away a £1bn cash pile. It has also ignored the City, only recently bowing to pressure to enfranchise its non-voting shares. Remarkably, its first analysts meeting was just three years ago and even then told the audience precious little.

Things could be about to change.

Cryptic George keeps City guessing

Attempting to reading meaning into what Eddie George says seems to have become the latest version of Kremlinology. It should perhaps be called Bankology. Whether his comments to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee means he is going to oppose a base rate cut at his meeting with the Chancellor next week is still anyone's guess, however.

MPs attack Bank over Barings collapse

PAUL WALLACE and JOHN EISENHAMMER

The Bank of England came under renewed attack yesterday over its handling of the Barings affair from the influential Treasury Select Committee.

Highlighting concerns about weaknesses exposed in the Bank's supervision, the committee said it intended to reopen its Barings inquiry in the new year. This is expected to involve calling some of the most senior former Barings executives to give evidence.

Sir Thomas Arnold, the Conservative chairman of the select committee, said the investigation would focus on the "the apparent discrepancy" between the findings of the Singapore investigation into Barings and the one conducted by the Bank of England's Board of Banking Supervision.

In a hard-hitting statement to Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, who was giving evidence to the committee on the Budget, Sir Thomas said: "We are concerned that the Bank has allowed some institutions to operate within an 'informal' control system and taken at face value management platitudes about the soundness of their profit without the rigorous scrutiny we believe necessary."

He reiterated the committee's view that the improvement it wished to see in banking supervision might require stripping the Bank of England of its supervisory responsibilities and the establishment of "a new, separate body with enhanced powers and a more thorough approach to its work."

Eddie George said he now regretted using the word "whiffhunting" in the previous hearing over the summer. He said the Bank would be producing a report to the Board of Banking Supervision before the end of the year outlining the actions already taken to implement the 17 recommendations set out in the report. Arthur Andersen, the management consultant, has been called in by the Bank to suggest ways of improving its supervisory systems.

Sir Thomas expressed the committee's concern that "while the Board of Banking Supervision report into the collapse of Barings was content to criticise senior Barings managers for failing to establish effective controls, the report of the Singapore authorities appears to go much further and suggests certain managers may have covered up for Mr. Leeson."

"The Singapore report is particularly critical of the role played by Peter Norris, the former head of Barings investment banking, accusing him of covering up vital warning signs that might have prevented the collapse of the bank under nearly £900m of Nick Leeson's derivatives trading losses."

Sir Thomas said this was "a far cry from blaming the debacle on the activities of one sole rogue trader." Some 23 former Barings executives are currently under investigation by the Securities and Futures Authority, the City watchdog.

Peter Baring, former chairman, Andrew Luckey, former deputy chairman who is still working at Barings as a consultant, and Mr Norris are expected to head the list of those called before the committee. This would be the first time they have given evidence in public about the crash.

But legal sources last night cast doubt on whether some of the executives would appear voluntarily. The committee would then have to ask the House to summon the executives to appear before it.

Early last month, Sir Thomas called for a Parliamentary debate on the Barings crash and the Bank of England's role. It appears that the Government has not found time for the debate, and this has persuaded the Treasury committee to intensify its inquiry.

Sir Thomas also drew attention to the fact that the Singapore report had, in a venomous six-page appendix, complained that its investigators in London had faced a lack of co-operation, and in some cases deliberate obstruction, by the Bank of England.



Andrew Thomas, Greenalls' chairman and chief executive (left), and Peter Greenall, managing director, yesterday announced that profits have passed £100m for the first time. Analysts believe Greenalls shares could become a constituent of the FT-SE 100 index next year. The company's market value has almost quadrupled to nearly £1.8bn since it pulled out of brewing six years ago to concentrate on pub retailing and leisure activities. Profits in the year to 29 September rose from £75m to £100.5m. *Investment Column*, page 26

Photograph: Edward Webb

Biotech thanks investors for staying

MAGNUS GRIMOND

Keith McCullagh, chief executive of British Biotech, yesterday thanked institutional investors for staying with the company over the long term – just days after two of his boardroom colleagues made a £3.2m short-term profit on share sales.

But Mr McCullagh did not appear embarrassed by the ac-

tion of his fellow directors. He vigorously defended their actions, denying that they showed any lack of commitment to the company.

James Noble, finance director, made a profit of £1.7m and Peter Lewis, head of research and development, pocketed £1.5m on Monday when they sold shares resulting from the exercise of options. The move

came after a 70 per cent jump in the shares following the release of initial trial results for marimastat, one of the company's drugs.

Now under development, the treatment could be a breakthrough in the treatment of cancer. Mr McCullagh suggested yesterday the drug could have a market worth £1.8bn.

He said the board was "en-

tirely comfortable" with the commitment of the two men involved in cashing in options. Both were highly talented individuals.

"They are both probably the most talented executives in their field today. It is in large part due to them that we are in the strong position we are in today," he said. Part of their remuneration comes through a

long-term share option scheme. Mr McCullagh said at a briefing given by the National Association of Pension Funds.

The scheme has been discussed and approved by the two main institutional investor bodies, the NAPF and the Association of British Insurers, as well as being cleared by shareholders at annual general meetings.

British Gas delay thwarted

MARY FAGAN Industrial Correspondent

The Government yesterday thwarted attempts by British Gas to delay competition in the domestic gas market, demanding that the industry stick to a start date of 1 April next year.

Tim Eggar, minister for energy and industry, insisted at a meeting yesterday that British Gas and its rivals work together to resolve any potential problems with computers or billing. One industry source who attended the talks said: "It was an

extremely forcefully led meeting by Mr Eggar."

It is understood that there may be rationing of the number of people who can transfer from British Gas per day in the initial stages, but only as a last resort. The Government may appoint a co-ordinator to ensure smooth progress in the run-up to the deadline.

The key meeting was called by the minister following concerns among British Gas's competitors that the company was deliberately dragging its feet. Clare Spottiswoode, the indus-

try watchdog, who also attended the meeting, is also thought to have become irritated by the company's attitude.

The importance of the issue was underlined by the decision of Cedric Brown, British Gas's chief executive, to attend the meeting. He was accompanied by Harry Moulson, managing director of the British Gas pipeline arm, Transco. Transco has argued that the systems required to allow multiple competitors into the marketplace needed more time for testing.

Industry View, page 26

Takeover nets Cluff £2.5m

Algy Cluff, founder and chairman of Cluff Resources, stands to gain £2.5m from shares and options following the launch by Ashanti Goldfields of an agreed bid for the goldmining group, writes Mary Fagan.

The proposed takeover, valuing Cluff Resources at £80m, ends weeks of speculation over the future of the company. Hutchison Whampoa of Hong Kong yesterday sold its 26.6 per cent stake to Ashanti for £21m. Other big shareholders include Provident Mutual Life and Echo Bay of the US.

Mr Cluff said: "It's sad to be

mugged, but that is capitalism for you. It is very sad to lose independence, having done so well after starting in what were very difficult circumstances."

He added: "They are paying a fair price. The offer clearly vindicates the considerable effort we have invested in Africa over the years."

The offer is one new Ashanti share for every 12 Cluff shares with a full cash alternative of 105p. The price represents a premium of 14 per cent over the middle market value on Wednesday. Cluff's shares rose 12p to 104p.

Mr Martin Landau – apology

In the item "Gowrie gets his teeth into the property world" in the City Diary on 26 October we referred to Mr Martin Landau, the Deputy Chairman of Development Securities Plc.

We regret the item's suggestion that Mr Landau was to blame for the loss which the Church Commissioners suffered in connection with a speculative development in Kent. We now accept that the suggestion was untrue and we apologise to Mr Landau.

'Gambler' holds 25% stake in Christies

DAVID HELLIER

Joseph Lewis, the man who has taken his stake in Christies, the fine art auction house, to more than 25 per cent this week, is known to his friends as an enthusiastic gambler. "He just loves gambling. He's bet on two flies climbing up a wall," one friend said yesterday.

He is said to be a heavy investor in the currency markets, where he takes large speculative positions and he is also said to be keen on betting on American football. Some of his friends say he is wealthier than the legendary currency speculator, George Soros.

Christies yesterday confirmed that Mr Lewis had increased his stake in the company to 25.32 per cent and later said it was in regular contact with its largest shareholder.

Peter Blythe, finance director, said Christies was in regular contact with all its large shareholders, including Mr Lewis.

Asked if Mr Lewis's investment had put the company on bid alert, Mr Blythe referred to a statement made recently by one of Mr Lewis's representatives. This, he said, had suggested his investment was a friendly, rather than unfriendly, one.

"He has bought over the last 18 months and the share price is higher now than for most of that period," Mr Blythe said.

Mr Lewis, who is London-born but Bahamas-based, has added 12 million shares to his 41.5 million holding in the past week. When he first started buying shares in Christies, he picked them up at around 150p through the small London brokers, Hargreave Hale. Yesterday they traded unchanged at 213p.

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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

Edited by TOM STEVENSON

Plodding GEC needs new blood

Another plodding performance from GEC yesterday only underlined impressions that Lord Weinstock's collection of defence and electronics operations is stagnating.

With the troublesome succession issue set aside until next year, it was time to focus on the core businesses. While some progress was made, there was nothing in the figures to suggest that the unexceptional growth pattern of recent years was about to change.

The 13p rise in the share price to 314.5p was as much relief as anything else, and simply made up the ground lost during the pessimistic run-up to these figures, taking the price back to where it had stood for much of the year.

Half-year profits rose 6.3 per cent to £402m, but when the contribution from the shipbuilder VSEL is stripped out the underlying numbers are down. The biggest boost to profits again came from the GPT telecommunications operation – the 60/40 joint venture with Germany's Siemens – where the drive for exports lifted pre-tax profits by £8m to £62m. Ironically it was GPT's chairman who fell on his sword last month after the succession row. The South-east Asian markets are growing strongly and GEC said great efforts were being made in the region.

But it was a different story at the defence and power systems divisions, both mature businesses where margins are under tough international pressure. Defence profits were up only £1m to £80m, while the fall at power systems from £76m to £70m was particularly disappointing. Marcel and GEC Alsthom both faced higher provisions for development costs on contracts, though profits and margins should start to improve from next year.

The company has been underperforming the market for some time, while investors await news of how a rejuvenated board might inject some dynamism into the company. There is tremendous potential within the group of businesses but the suspicion remains that new blood is needed to unlock the earnings potential.

After yesterday's analysts' meeting, GEC watchers said Lord Weinstock appeared to have as tight a grip on the company as ever, and he had nothing to say about when his successor would be announced.

GEC's order book, boosted by the acquisition of VSEL, remains strong at £13.8bn, though it is always difficult to know how this will translate into profits. The company's famous cash pile had fallen by £223m to £1.2bn since the end of March, and its share of net cash in joint ventures fell by £194m to £1.28bn. A 5 per cent increase in its dividend to 3.1p was in line with forecasts.

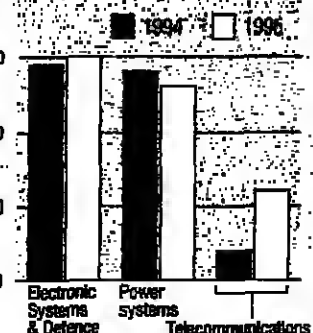
GEC: at a glance

Market value: £28.85bn, share price 314.5p

Trading record	1993	1994	1995	1994	1995
Turnover (£bn)	5.61	5.79	5.84	2.68	2.68
Pre-tax profits (£m)	883	888	881	376	402
Earnings per share (pence)	19.7	19.8	20.6	8.6	9.1
Dividends per share (pence)	10.30	10.82	11.37	2.95	3.10

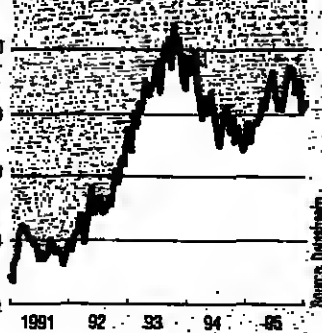
Pre-tax profit

by main divisions, £m



Share price

pence



Group full-year profit forecasts of around £970m, with earnings of 22.5p, put the shares on a forward multiple of 14. That is a discount to the market but an appropriate one. Fairly priced.

Greenalls closes in on top table

By this time next year Greenalls Group should be rubbing shoulders with the top brass of corporate UK. From being lost in a time warp under heavy family influence six years ago, the group now sports a market capitalisation of close to £1.6bn, tantalisingly close to a coveted place in the Footsie.

While the steep climb through the ranks owes a great deal to acquisitions, it would be churlish not to give credit to the board's strategic vision – starting when Greenalls abandoned brewing following the Beer Orders and bought out the family investors' favourable voting rights to make the company's paper a tradable currency.

Results for the year to September, announced yesterday, passed another milestone in the company's transformation, with taxable profits clearing £100m for the first time by a margin of £500,000. The previous year's £74.8m included an extra week's trading which, when stripped out, implies underlying growth of 18 per cent.

Most of the leap in the year's profits was attributable to having the acquisition of the Devenish pub chain fully integrated into the system, benefits from purchasing power on beer supply agreements with the big brewers, and sharply increased takings across the pub estate.

Given that nearly all the numbers were known when Greenalls swooped on the Boddington pub and leisure group in October, it was no surprise yesterday that the reaction was muted and the shares slipped 3p to 537p. The price has outperformed the market by 13 per cent since that deal.

The picture is the same as those from powerful peers such as Whitbread, Bass, and Scottish & Newcastle. It is convergence in the leisure sector, where the challenge is to capture a decent share of increasing leisure time and discretionary spending, a challenge to which Greenalls is rising.

It is also in good shape financially. Despite the company's seemingly insatiable appetite for acquisitions and determination to reinvest heavily in existing businesses, Greenalls has remained broadly cash-neutral. Barring the temptation to write more acquisition cheques, current gearing of 70 per cent should fall by 5 points a year.

Greenalls profits this year should climb to £147m, giving earnings per share of 38p, and beyond £170m in 1996/97. The prospective p/e of 14.2 is only a shade below Whitbread and Bass, and although its yield is rather less attractive than its bigger peers, the shares are still worth buying.

Blue Circle turns up heat

About time, too, Blue Circle's critics will say of the restructuring of its heating division announced yesterday. But even the hears will find it hard to fault the substance of the proposed changes, or at least those the company can discuss within the straitjacket of French employment law.

Blue Circle put together its Potlatch heating operations in a haphazard way over a number of years at the top of the market in the late 1980s. It shows now in an illogical operational structure across the UK, France and Germany, and the bulk of the £55m being set aside to rationalise the business is to put the pieces together in a sensible fashion.

The good news for investors is that the cost of creating centres of excellence for boilers and radiators is offset by a £55m profit from the sale of the company's landfill activities, leaving analysts' forecasts broadly unchanged. The other plus is the fact that Keith Orrell-Jones, chief executive, has been here before, stripping out costs with gusto from the core cement business and seeing profits soar.

Restoring the fortunes of heating is a more complex task than sorting out the cement side, with a need to improve the sales line through better marketing as well as the easier job of slashing overheads. But the City is convinced that, if anyone can succeed, Mr Orrell-Jones can.

The company says it is committed to heating, and to bathrooms in which it is proposing to invest a further £40m over the next three years to build in state-of-the-art production technology. But whether it keeps the business, or tarts it up to sell it on, the restructuring is a welcome development.

Having cleared up one of the biggest uncertainties hanging over the company, the deal is also good news for the shares, despite the impression given by yesterday's 7p fall to 330p. On the basis of forecast profits of £324.5m next year and £354m in 1997, the shares stand on a prospective price/earnings ratio of 13 falling to 12.

With strong cash flow from cement and a rock-solid, nil-gear balance sheet, the shares are attractive.

Simon Pincombe CITY DIARY

Fergie's baubles slip through gap in policy

We can exclusively reveal why the scatter-brained Duchess of York looked so relieved when the Federal Bureau of Investigation recovered her baubles. They were not insured. As it stands the accident-prone ambassador will be reduced to asking for an *ex gratia* payment from her insurers to pay for the damage done to the £250,000 necklace. Because she is the daughter-in-law of the monarch this is certain to be forthcoming.

Unlike Windsor Castle (which belongs to the nation), the Royal personal effects are insured. But there are special conditions attached. One of the requirements is that the jewels be either worn by – or "under the personal supervision of" – the insured whenever they are taken out of the safety deposit box.

"Clearly there is not going to be much personal supervision in the hold of a 747," one insider said.

The Royal insurance is written in the London market, spread over a number of syndicates because no one syndicate wants to carry all the risk (and who can blame them?). A fun-loving duchess would need to do business with one of the three managing agents that write special policies for "high net worth individuals". The market leader is Hiscox, which declines to comment on clients.

"Pass," said a director. These special policies allow the insured much more flexibility than standard contracts. They also allow the insured to behave like a buffoon (if it is felt the client acted honestly). For breaking all the rules the Duchess will earn a stiff reprimand and an *ex gratia* payment for any

loss suffered. "We look at the person rather than the policy," said one high net worth insurer. "If they seem intelligent and likely to look after their property we would accept. Once we have accepted the business we do not normally reconsider."

The Queen's accountant was also on his knees yesterday. Colin Sharman, senior partner of KPMG, was seen swabbing down the floors in Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Hackney – part of a 40-strong socially conscious team led by his secretary. "If a photographer turns up, you're dead," he hissed.



High net worth: Duchess gives new meaning to insurers' concept of "personal supervision"

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Alastair Darling is put off the concept of wider share ownership for life after a frightful to-do during the annual ProShare dinner at the Dorchester. This was the first time that a Labour City spokesman had dined with this breed of capitalist and it was unfortunate that the cabinet act – an intimidating imitation of Shirley Bassey – should take a fancy to the silver-haired politician. Belting out the lyrics "Kiss me, Kiss me, Kiss me" the singer slunk over to Mr Darling and began grinding her hips suggestively – much to the amusement of a smug Michael Heseltine at the next table who appeared grateful not to have to handle this particular hot potato.

It comes as no surprise to learn that Rebecca Jenkins, managing director of the Lane Group, has won the *Comptroller/American Express* achievement award for industry.

Lane Group is a Bristol-based haulage company and the judges were impressed by Ms Jenkins's ability to extract a doubled turnover from her 100 truck drivers since she took over at the company in 1989.

Mattel is forced to admit that there is now a world shortage of Barbie dolls. This year's Happy Holiday edition (dressed in white lace petticoat and sequin gown) has proven too much for the 100,000 sad souls who spend their lives collecting the dolls. They have been carrying the dolls from US stores in armfuls and Mattel concedes that it cannot keep up with demand.

For the record, the 1988 Happy Holiday edition is still the most prized, changing hands for \$800 – 20 times the retail price.

INDEPENDENT

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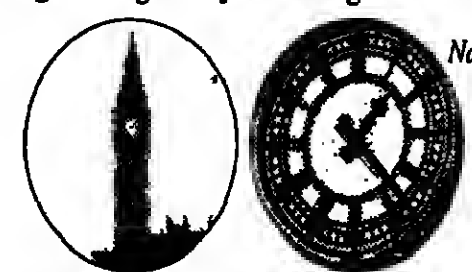
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INDUSTRY VIEW

PETER RODGERS

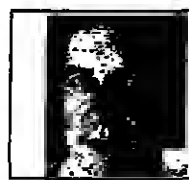
This week I decided to end a long and sometimes troubled relationship with British Gas, and as a result expect to be around £300 a year better off. The break with the past came after a large international oil company offered to undercut my annual gas bill by 27 per cent, with no fuss and bother or even a requirement to change the meter, which will continue to be read by British Gas.

It is only at moments like that, when an offer of a real saving drops through the letterbox, that all the political rows and arcane technical arguments about deregulation in the gas industry begin to mean something.

The Government has been well aware of this fact for a long time. Why else would Tim Eggar, the industry minister, have spent yesterday in a summit meeting with the gas industry and its regulator, nailing down a timetable for spreading competition – and therefore price cuts – to all gas customers?

Privatisation has become a dirty word, at least in part because of the pay and profits controversy that has erupted over the last 12 months. Ministers now believe that their best hope of convincing electors that the sale of state utilities was worthwhile is to deliver new and much more dramatic price cuts than those seen in the first few years of privatisation. This was probably the main reason the Government was so enthusiastic about a £50-a-head electricity rebate, which will follow the flotation of National Grid.

Indeed, thinking the unthinkable, it is possible that by the end of the decade privatisation will have become a popular vote-winner, if the



introduction of competition to all domestic gas and electricity markets goes ahead smoothly. What a shame for Mr Eggar if a Labour government reaps the benefits of all his hard work.

Most domestic gas consumers will have to wait until 1998 before they are given the freedom to shop around. But anybody with a gas bill of more than £1,100 – a level not difficult to reach in a draughty early-19th century house without cavity walls – is already entitled

buyers to scrape in under the wire and experience the financial delights of competition ahead of other consumers with smaller houses, better draught-proofing or more efficient boilers.

Although for most domestic consumers the savings will not be available for two to three years, those in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset will by now have had a glimpse of what competition will mean.

British Gas's rivals, such as Amerasia Hess and Total, are

British Gas is portraying itself as the victim, about to be crucified in the domestic market

to make the switch. Rival gas companies are happy to oblige. Competition is in fact already here for all customers whose gas consumption is above 2,500 therms, as a result of a gradual deregulation imposed by the Government to encourage fuel cost reductions for business. For business consumers, competition has sent prices crashing by an average of 40 per cent. British Gas's share of the business market has plummeted.

The legislation that sets the threshold at which competition is permitted specifies only the amount consumed, not the type of customer. It is this that allows a significant number of private

bombarding the area with literature promising significant savings next year when a pilot scheme is introduced, after April. Companies are promising 15 per cent, or around £50, off a typical gas bill.

But this may be the phony war in the marketing campaign, which could become more interesting if British Gas decides to punch its enormous weight when it responds with its own offensive, now being drawn up with the help of teams of external advisers.

One response could be a range of defensive new tariffs tailored to different types of home, coupled with price cuts across the board.

Not surprisingly, British Gas is portraying itself as the victim, squeezed by competition in the business market, hampered by long-term North Sea supply contracts at high prices and about to be crucified in the domestic market.

The company was recently distributing charts to the press to demonstrate how badly its share price was underperforming the stock market, a trend most FT-SE companies would prefer not to remind their investors about.

The British Gas agenda in trying to demonstrate its own weaknesses is transparently obvious. It wants to win a delay in the introduction of domestic competition, and put pressure on the Government to help get the company out of onerous North Sea contracts.

Most important of all, it must win a reasonable deal from Clare Spottiswoode, the industry regulator, for Transco, the pipeline company at the heart of British Gas whose regulatory and pricing regime is being overhauled. Transco will remain an enormous cash-generating monopoly, because all competing suppliers must pay to use it.

It is quite possible that competition will one day drive British Gas entirely out of the business of marketing gas to consumers, through voluntarily selling the business. This is a possibility some senior British Gas executives take seriously.

The real agenda, and the reason British Gas is playing up the multiple threats it faces, is that it must protect the profitability of the transmission business at all costs. In response, Mrs Spottiswoode should put the squeeze on as tightly as she can.

IN BRIEF

£78m bill as BICC pulls out of housing

BICC will charge £78m against profits after its withdrawal from housebuilding. Having sold Clarke Homes for £61m to Westbury yesterday, the company will write off £34m – the difference between the sale price and Clarke's book value – plus £44m to cover goodwill written off at the time of the acquisition in 1987. In the year to last December, Clarke made an operating loss of £3m.

Sutcliffe Speakman moves into solvents

Sutcliffe Speakman, the emission control group, is staging a five-for-four rights issue to fund the reverse takeover of Samuel Banner, a solvents blender and distributor. The cash call will raise £16.1m towards the £30.6m cost. In the nine months to September, Banner made profits of £2.04m on sales of £32.62m. Sutcliffe lifted pre-tax profits 74 per cent to £540,000; dividend rose to 0.325p.

market report/shares

TAKING STOCK

Fears of competition from Internet take toll on Reed

DATA BANK

FT-SE 100

3,639.5 -23.3

FT-SE 250

3,953.9 -5.0

FT-SE 350

1,804.7 -0.6

SEAO VOLUME

27,255 bargains

Gilt Index

96.03 -0.49

SHARE SPOTLIGHT

100 index ending 23.3 points

lower at 3,639.5. Even New

York, which has on so many

occasions offered support, failed

to oblige, with the Dow Jones

Average showing acute signs of

over-exuberance. High-tech

stocks in New York were par-

ticularly hard hit with UNET,

the buyer of Unipalm, and

Netscape under pressure.

Eddie George, Governor of

the Bank of England, added to

Reed International, the publishing group, felt the impact of the Internet, the world-wide computer network.

Shares of the Anglo-Dutch giant tumbled 46p to 999p as *Forbes*, the US business magazine, drew attention to the competition many of Reed's more obscure, but lucrative, academic and business magazines could suffer from Internet competition.

The publishing setback set the tone for a lacklustre stock market session with the FT-SE 100 index ending 23.3 points lower at 3,639.5. Even New York, which has on so many occasions offered support, failed to oblige, with the Dow Jones Average showing acute signs of over-exuberance. High-tech stocks in New York were particularly hard hit with UNET, the buyer of Unipalm, and Netscape under pressure.

Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, added to

the uncertainty with his hint to one of the parliamentary select committees that he would be reluctant to go along with an interest rate cut.

HSBC, the banking giant that embraces Midland Bank, was rattled by rumours that a Japanese institution, said to be an insurance group, was trying to place a large line of stock, possibly more than 10 million shares, in Hong Kong.

In London, HSBC shaded to 991p and Standard Chartered, as takeover hopes dwindled and more than 6 million shares hovered, lost 22p to 566p. Other banks edged lower.

British Gas was the subject of a Merrill Lynch placing of 10 million shares with stories of a further 10 million over-hanging adding to the discomfort. The sale, thought to be institutional, left the shares 3.5p lower at 229p. BT remained under pressure falling 6p to 346p, lowest since 1992.



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

The belligerent Oriel programme over prices and the seemingly ever-increasing competition to what is, in effect, a staid old player in the telecommunications business, continued to take their toll.

Footsie again undermined shares, off a further 6p to 211p. Among other Footsie casualties Arjo Wiggins Appleton fell 7.5p to 158.5p and De La Rue 3p to 652p.

Airtours, the holidays group that has been under intense pressure on worries of a profits collapse, jumped 17p to 338p on talk the US holiday business, Carnival Cruise Lines, is hovering.

T&N, the car components group, gained 10p to 130p after it settled a US asbestos claim at £6.5m, much lower than expected. It had been sued for £30m. But T&N's success is dwarfed by the looming £185m action by Chase Manhattan Bank where a jury verdict is expected any day.

Chief Resources, the gold miner, at last produced a bidder - Ashtanti Goldfields which is prepared to offer £80m in shares. It already has 26.6 per cent of its target, picking up Hutchison Whampoa's stake.

But Wensum, the clothing group that has attracted intense takeover speculation, tumbled 10p to 137p, following its denial of any merger talks.

The shares are still, however, comfortably above their year's low.

Megalomedia, the latest Saatchi vehicle, continued its remarkable progress on AIM, closing up 20p at 114p after

11p, Pet City, placed at 300p, ended at 355p.

The next AIM recruits could include Dmstec, an Israeli computer group, and CPS, a Luxembourg property services group.

Proteus, the computer-linked drugs group, demonstrated the vulnerability of the bio-babes when it said a deal involving DNA-binding drug had hit a hitch. The group still expects to produce five revenue-earning agreements by the end of its current financial year, to March. The shares displayed their unease, tumbling 23p to 126p.

Pison, the hand-held computer group, staged a modest rally, up 25p to 790p. A new market-maker in the shares, in take over from NatWest Securities, is expected to be announced next week. If Pison can produce a replacement it should avoid being relegated in the SEAT share market.

Flare Group, the former J Hewitt & Son, gained 12p to 116p as the stock market braced itself for bad action. The company is 27 per cent owned by Ian Gowie Smith (ex-Medeva and now involved in the suspended Black & Edgington) and David Lees. It is thought to be firing on all cylinders and could hit £800,000 profit for the year, although there is a danger of a big tax charge eroding earnings. Deals are on the way. One has fallen down but another is near.

SWE making timber frame structures for houses and spiral staircases, shaded to 12p. It is raising £1.1m through a rights issue underwritten by stockbroker Ellis & Partners. Alan Chamberlain, ex-Elleman Lines, and corporate financier Stephen Barclay have joined the board.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items. Other details of the report are available on request at a Unilever Securities Market's Superfund pp Parity Paid pm Nil Paid Shares.

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from Sead. Simply dial 0800 123 333, followed by the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports dial 0800 1233 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

FT-SE 100 - Real-time	00	Stirling Rates	04	Privatisation Issues	36
UK Stock Market Report	01	Subson Report	05	Water Shares	39
UK Company News	02	West Hill Report	20	Electricity Shares	40
Foreign Exchange	03	Tokyo Market	21	High Street Banks	41

Anyone with a land-line telephone can use this service. For a detailed description of the Independent Index, including its portfolio facility, phone 0800 123 333. For assistance, call our helpline 0171 873 4375 (9.30am - 5.30pm).

Calls cost 30p per minute (cheap rate), and 40p at all other times. Call charges include VAT.

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol
British Gas	500000	General Elect	120000	S&P Foodchain	80000
BT	100000	Carson	120000	SP	40000
Heron	100000	Volvo	100000	BTI	70000
BT	100000	Telecom	100000	BTI	70000
BT	100000	GLS	90000	BTI	70000

FT-SE 100 index hour by hour

Open 3637.7 up 0.8	11.00 3657.7 down 4.1	14.00 3652.8 down 10.0
09.00 3652.0 down 0.8	12.00 3652.0 down 4.5	15.00 3649.2 down 13.6
10.00 3650.7 down 2.1	13.00 3650.0 down 2.3	Closes 3639.5 down 23.3

RETAILERS FOOD

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

RETAILERS GENERAL

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

RETAILERS WINE & CIGARS

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

SUPPORT SERVICES

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

RIGHTS ISSUES

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

RECENT ISSUES

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

Government Securities

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

SHORTS

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

MEDIUMS

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

LONGS

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

UNDATED

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Asda	14.00	+0.10	Waitrose	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10
Boys	14.00	+0.10	Boys	14.00	+0.10

Day of

[illegible]

Vol	Week	Set	Day	Ytd	Foreign Exchange Rates
250	250	250	250	250	STERLING
250	250	250	250	250	Country Spot
250	250	250	250	250	1 month 3 months
250	250	250	250	250	DOLLAR
250	250	250	250	250	Country Spot
250	250	250	250	250	1 month 3 months
250	250	250	250	250	D-MARK
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250	250	250	250	250	1 month 3 months
250	250	250	250	250	Other Spot Rates
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The image shows a vertical strip of a horse racing program page. The visible sections include:

- CHELTENHAM**: A section header for a racing event.
- DONCASTER**: Another section header for a racing event.
- HORSE RACING**: A general section header.
- ACQUILINE**: An advertisement or brand name at the bottom.

The page is heavily degraded with noise and artifacts, making the text difficult to read. The layout appears to be a standard racing program with race results, odds, and advertisements.

SPORT

On Monday: 24-page sports section

CRICKET: England batsmen unable to maintain interest on cloying surface that bowler DeFreitas belatedly finds is to his liking

Thorpe thrives on damp ground

DEREK PRINGLE
reports from Paarl
England 263-8 v Boland

The supreme effort needed by the overwork to breach the lofty Drakenstein mountains that flank this pleasant ground made them a determined and hardy bunch, not given to failure. Although these are qualities Michael Atherton has been preaching and practising since assuming the England captaincy, his team do not seem able to follow their leader.

Atherton was not playing yes-

Paarl scoreboard

(First day of four; England won toss)

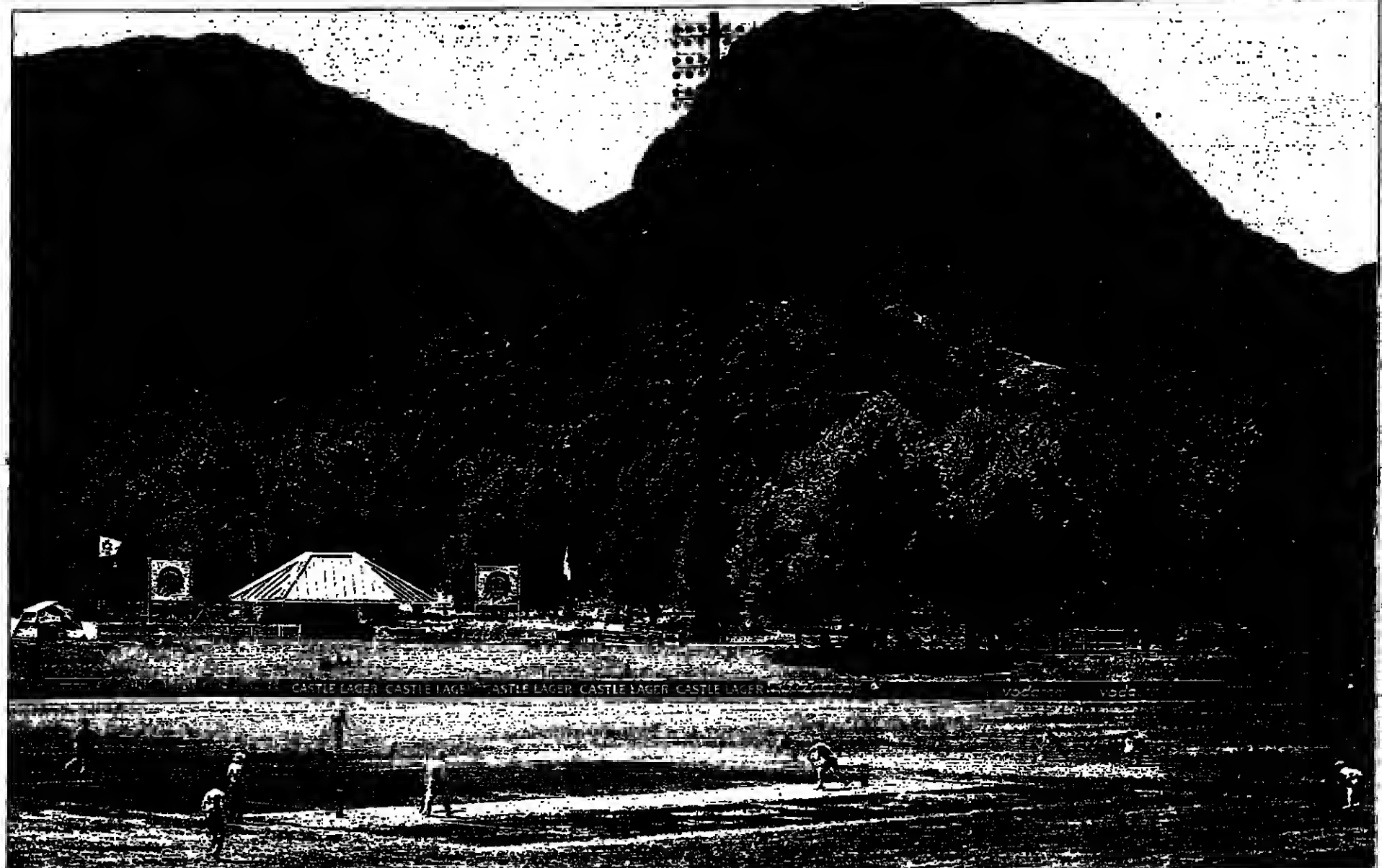
ENGLAND - First innings	
R A Smith b Stelling	39
A J Stewart b Stelling	39
J P Crawley c L M Germishuys b Drew	6
G A Thorpe c L M Germishuys b Drew	56
C A Walsh b Henderson	32
R G Russell not out	46
M Henderson c Stelling b Henderson	24
D Gough b Willoughby	3
P J Martin c L M Germishuys	3
b DeFreitas	3
R K Bingham not out	9
Extras (b6, w1, nb3)	10
Total (after 8, 107 overs)	263
Runs 2-54 2-74 3-113 4-180 5-180 6-217 7-224 8-233	
To bat: M C Birt	
To bowl: DeFreitas 14-4-17-1; Willoughby 17-1-65-2; Stelling 13-4-36-2; Henderson 25-13-65-2; Drew 28-4-77-2	
BOLAND: L M Germishuys, B C Beggay, K C Jackson, J Lott, P Kiger, W F Stelling, L M Germishuys, P A J DeFreitas, C Henderson, C M Willoughby, B J Drew.	
Umpires: M Begg and R Brooks.	

terday as England, after the thrilling stage of last Monday, seemed unable to maintain interest on a pitch whose surface behaved like drying putty. Only Graham Thorpe and Jack Russell seemed intent on making the undemanding Boland bowlers work for their wickets, with Thorpe scoring 56 and Russell batting close to three hours for his 45.

This ground is only in its second first-class season. Last year the equivalent match here had to be abandoned, the umpires ruling the pitch too dangerous after several batsmen were struck in the throat. To prevent this happening, the groundsmen have taken to watering the pitch just before the start, and already this season two matches have been delayed because of its lavish use of the hosepipe.

If the surface was damp and sporty, it did not show, for the opening hostilities from Phil DeFreitas were muted, the Derbyshire man quickly opting for line and length after seeing Robin Smith bludgeon his opening partner, the lanky Schard Willoughby, for three quick boundaries.

Willoughby fed Smith's off-side repertoire as if it were a slot machine with a saucy smile and England raced to fifty in only 54 balls. But just as Smith promised his most fluent knock



Backdrop to Boland: England play out their first innings as the cricket is second best to the scenery at Paarl yesterday

Photograph: Clive Mason/Allsport

of the tour he was bowled for 39, by a beauty from Billy Stelling that seemed away off the pitch to hit off-stump.

The dismissal meant an early opportunity for John Crawley to show his many supporters here, many of whom are sporting closely cropped heads, that he has the kind of credentials, if not the most politically correct haircut, to make the England No 3 spot his own. All looked well,

but after cracking a cover drive for four to get off the mark, he was clumsily stumped by Louis-Mark Germishuys after lurching down the pitch to the off-spinner Brian Drew. After Mark Ramprakash's two-ball journey to the precipice of no return at the Wanderers, Crawley is set to play in the next Test, but not necessarily at No 3 where Smith may yet make a return.

Of all the possibilities, Alec

Stewart would probably be best suited to the role. His last Test fifty as an opening batsman for England was at Lord's against New Zealand, 16 months ago. His dismissal here, bowled driving loosely at Stelling, was almost identical to the one in England's second innings in Johannesburg, where Brian McMillan forced a similar stutter in his footwork, a flaw that, until corrected, is likely to be

ruthlessly exploited by South Africa's new-ball bowlers.

In fact, only a breezy half-century from his Surrey team-mate, Thorpe, and a hard-hit cameo from Graeme Hick, that included a cleanly struck straight six off Drew, prevented England from losing out completely to the scenery. However, when both were out in quick succession, Russell took over with his now renowned

crab-with-a-spade role, and the mountain view won out.

DeFreitas, who had one or two points to prove in this match, looked uninterested until the second new ball. With Mike Watkinson already gone for 24, brilliantly caught one-handed by a diving Stelling at short mid-off, he tormented England's tail with eight successive maidens. His only reward came after a disputable

dismissal for caught behind as his old Lancashire team-mate, Peter Martin, fended at a bounce. This allowed Richard Illingworth to apply a dollop of his own brand of Russell-like adhesive before the close as England ended the day 263-8. With the home side's spinners, Drew and Claude Henderson, sending down 63 of the 109 overs bowled, Illingworth will be in for an even stickier time today.

McGhee's resignation angers Leicester

Football
CATHERINE RILEY

Mark McGhee's appointment as manager of Wolves could be delayed following his controversial departure from Leicester yesterday. McGhee angered Leicester by rejecting a salary increase and resigning, along with his No 2, Colin Lee, and coach Mike Hickman.

Wolves—who could face a bill of up to £2.5m in legal fees, pay-offs to their former manager Graham Taylor and coach Steve Harrison, and signing-on

costs for the Leicester trio—may delay an announcement until after Sunday's trip to Luton.

"If he goes to Wolves I hope they get relegated," Steve Walsh, the club captain said. "All the players are very upset. They want to prove to Mark that what he's done is wrong. We feel that what's happened is a disgrace."

Martin George, the Leicester chairman, said: "Mark would have been among the five best-paid managers in the country. The board beat over backwards to try to get him to stay—to a level that made some of us doubt our own wisdom."

George applied for a High Court injunction in an attempt to stop Brian Little joining Aston Villa a year ago, and another court battle appears to be looming. Both the Football League and Football Association are to monitor the situation to see whether any regulations have been broken.

"I'm very disappointed with what has happened," George said. "We spent a long time and a great deal of effort trying to fulfil what we all wanted to do and we didn't achieve anything."

Walsh, a Leicester player for 10 years, will take charge of

team affairs along with Chris Turner, Garry Parker and the youth team coach, David Nish, while Leicester begin seeking a new manager for the second time in a year.

Coventry City, who are currently at the bottom of the Premier League and 29th in debt, are to announce two new signings—one loan and one permanent—today. However, they have seen their bid to take Dave McPherson from Hearts on loan fall through due to the player's injury.

A group of six Manchester-based millionaires have com-

pleted talks for a proposed takeover of Portsmouth. The consortium, led by businessman Warren Smith, held a meeting with the managing director, Martin Gregory, son of the club's owner, Jim Gregory, and the takeover is set to go through before Christmas.

"We have had a favourable response from Mr Gregory in our offer to acquire the club and we hope to be able to make a formal announcement by Monday of next week," said Smith. Birmingham are to request a personal hearing in an effort to clear their name after being

charged by the FA with misconduct over crowd trouble at their match against Millwall last month. The First Division side could face a substantial fine, or even closure of their ground if the charge is proved.

Fulham and Gillingham have both been charged with misconduct by the FA following their game on 25 November. Ten players were booked and two sent off, and the referee's report to the FA described the last 10 minutes of the Division Three match as "the most disgraceful exhibition by professional footballers I have ever seen."

Crowds flock to see return of Ferguson

GUY HODGSON

Duncan Ferguson has come to the attention of the police before and last night he did so again. A broken line of yellow-hibed officers was strung around Goodison Park looking like it wished it was elsewhere. On an arctic night who could blame them?

Not that the most famous release since The Beatles' "Free As A Bird" had done anything to merit their attention. Some 10,000 people had come to see

Ferguson make his return in an Everton shirt following his recent prison term. He was playing in a reserve match against Newcastle and the police were there to shepherd the players rather than put him under surveillance.

There is no doubt that Ferguson's 44-day jail sentence for assaulting a fellow player has elevated the Scottish striker to a status, in Evertonian minds, far beyond his feats on the field. "Duncan is innocent" tee-shirts have been doing a flourishing business.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 2852, Friday 8 December By Phil

Thursday's Solution

1 Across: 1. 'Orsmen desultorily trapping one in a messy way' (8) 2. Bridge opponents left high-scoring card, causing trouble? (6) 3. Cartel wrath less activated by major economic collapse? (4,6,5) 4. What could be tatty, namely, book bound in red? (7) 5. Privileged member with batting team getting runs (7) 6. Leaders of Young Conservatives mobbing one in a gathering? It may lead to suspension (8) 7. Weapon to ensnare love—a scowl (5) 8. Editor, receiving pieces, has to edit (5) 9. Keep principal one's investment in cash? (8) 10. Electrical units—name used in SI here, possibly (7)

11 Down: 1. Opposing a good one this month (7) 2. How stupid can a board member be? (2,5,2,1,5) 3. Come out to see them before inviting leader of gang in (6) 4. Rash chap's going round Leeds after a riot (8) 5. New women's group having split purpose? Not advisable (6) 6. Distribution of beer to all that is easy to accept (9) 7. Be naughty? Would I, likewise, be naughty ultimately? (7) 8. Bot securing high-class car would make you a happy character? (5) 9. Company absorbed by one in rising Mediterranean city (7)

12 Across: 1. A big star turning up for an Oscar? (5) 2. Energy yonder—one source of luminosity in the heavens (8) 3. Ale—one carrying bone disease (4,4) 4. Another Phil? Means agonised discomfort, we hear (8) 5. Struggling to retain European position with regard to a certain line (9) 6. Make version of sharper English? (8) 7. Forceful part of golf technique (7) 8. Being cornered, runs, getting knocked about (7) 9. Fines acceptable in revolutionary groups (6) 10. Fool about with saltpetre (5) 11. English article is superior to the French passage (5)

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Bates lets in Harding

The public feud between the chairman, Ken Bates, and the club's landlord, Matthew Harding, over the control of Chelsea moved behind closed doors at Stamford Bridge yesterday.

The club announced after a board meeting that the pair would lunch and sit together at tomorrow's home Premiership match against Newcastle. That implied Bates had agreed to lift the ban on Harding taking his seat in the directors' box and using the boardroom facilities, though both refused to comment before leaving the ground.

Now extensive discussions will take place in private to try to turn the public tussle into a lasting peace. A statement from the club added: "Discussions are proceeding on the best way forward

to finance and achieve Chelsea Football Club's future aspirations in the best interests of the club and its supporters."

Harding said only that it was a "very satisfactory meeting", while Bates said simply: "I'm very pleased with the way it went. There's nothing more I can say now."

The thaw followed a month-long dispute which had seen Harding refused permission even to park his car at Stamford Bridge. It was thought before the two-hour meeting that Harding, who has £26.5m invested in Chelsea, would offer to end the stand-off. He said: "I'm not going along looking for trouble, and I hope Ken isn't either. We haven't spoken for the best part of a month and I'm

looking forward to seeing him."

Harding had avoided a confrontation by watching games from the £5m North Stand he helped finance. He was, however, welcomed warmly into the directors' boxes at Leeds and Manchester United.

Bates, who has been suffering from pneumonia, has not attended a Chelsea game since 4 November. The pair had been at odds after Harding revealed he had resigned from the board of Chelsea Village, the club's parent company. He recognised that the row was a distraction from issues such as development of the south stand. Bates wants to accommodate a hotel, shops, offices and flats. Harding believes the investment in the team should take precedence.

Football's fastest goal claimed

GUY HODGSON AND LIZ SEARL

The statisticians will no doubt continue to disagree among themselves, but an Australian international by the name of Damian Mori has staked what could prove the best claim yet to the fastest goal in senior football history.

As Mori's team, Adelaide City, lined up for the start of Wednesday night's Australian National League match against Sydney United, the striker spotted the opposition goalkeeper, John Perosh, off his line. From the kick-off Bradley Hasell passed to Mori, who promptly lobbed the ball over Perosh and into the net. The goal was timed at four seconds.

Other goals have been recorded at four seconds (and indeed one at 3.5sec), but Mori may have the most legitimate claim as his goal was filmed, unlike most of those in the record books.

Adelaide City officials said they would send a copy of the film to the Guinness Book of Records, which currently lists four goals, all scored in six seconds, as the fastest in history: Albert Mundy (Aldershot v Hartlepool, 1958), Barrie Jones (Newport v Torquay, 1962), Keith Smith (Crystal Palace v Derby, 1964) and Tommy Langley (Queen's Park Rangers v Bolton, 1980).

One other notable goal was recorded at six seconds, but the scorer is probably glad that his name does not appear in most record books: Pat Kruse's strike after six seconds while playing for Torquay against Cambridge in 1977 is believed to be the fastest own goal in history.

In fact most statisticians agree that the fastest goal of all time was scored by Colin Cowperthwaite, who found the net after 3.5sec playing for Barrow against Kettering Town in 1979. There are also two instances in professional football of goals

said to have been scored after only four seconds. The match referee confirmed that time for Jim Fryatt's goal for Bradford Park Avenue against Tranmere in 1964, while off-pitch observers also recorded four seconds for Malcolm Macdonald's lob for Newcastle United in a friendly against St Johnstone in 1972.

At international level Bryan Robson has the rare distinction of holding two records for the fastest goal. His strike after 27 seconds for England against France in 1982 was the fastest goal recorded in the World Cup finals, while his 38-second effort against Yugoslavia in 1989 is the fastest recorded at Wembley.

Ray Spiller, of the Association of Football Statisticians, said that Cowperthwaite's goal was generally recognised as the fastest in history. However, he said the arguments were likely to rage on because the football authorities have no system for officially recognising the time of goals.

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